



PERTTI J. ANTONEN

Tradition through Modernity

Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship

Studia Fennica
Folkloristica

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SKS

P.O. Box 259

FI-00171 Helsinki

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Preface

This book deals with the relationship between tradition and modernity and the modernness of objectifying, representing and studying folklore and oral traditions. The first section focuses on modern and tradition as modern concepts, and the conception of folklore and its study as a modern trajectory. The second section discusses the politics of folklore with regard to nationalism, and the role of folk tradition in the production of nation-state identity in Finland.

My discussion of these issues emerges from selected perspectives on postmodernism and postmodernist thinking. These were topical, and in some circles radical issues in the early 1990s, when I was taking graduate courses at the Department of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States and writing my doctoral dissertation. I am aware that today, more than ten years after, postmodernism seems like out-dated rhetoric, but I can excuse myself by saying that I have an antiquarian interest in things postmodern. The first section of the book draws heavily on literature from the 1980s and early 1990s because that part was originally written for the dissertation. I have used it here – changing in places the present tense to the past and adding newer references – with the belief that it still functions as a theoretical and research historical orientation to the discussion on the politics of folk tradition in the second section. I also believe that many of the points made in conjunction with postmodernism continue to deserve consideration. This is especially so in the field of folklore studies, which was never saturated with the postmodernist critique of modernism. There are academic environments in which such ‘postmodernist’ issues as reflexivity and representation and their implications for both ethnographic and archival research still await discovery.

In addition to my doctoral dissertation, the research conducted for this book has encompassed four different research projects and networks which all have been concerned with the politics of identity and the construction of tradition, history and heritage. Some of them have dealt directly with the topic of the present book, while others have also served as frameworks for enhancing and developing my parallel research on a multi-faceted and controversial item of political mythology and heritage production in Finland: the folklore-based narrative construction of the birth of the nation and the

killing of its allegedly first foreign visitor. I will be presenting the results of this study in a forthcoming publication.

The first of my formative research projects and networks was 'Europe and the Nordic Countries: Modernization, Identification, and the Making of Traditions and Folklore', launched in 1992 with me as the project leader and sponsored by the Nordic Institute of Folklore. The work of the project culminated in the book *Making Europe in Nordic Contexts* (1996), which I edited. I hereby wish to extend my thanks to the other members of this project: Eyðun Andreassen on the Faroe Islands, Jan Garnert in Sweden, Stein R. Mathisen in Norway and Gísli Sigurðsson in Iceland.

The second international network to help me push my research forward was the project 'National Heroes: Construction and Deconstruction', sponsored by the French Ministry of Culture and Mission du Patrimoine ethnologique in Paris, together with L'Ecomusée du Creusot-Montceau (Le Creusot, France), Deutsches Hygiene-Museum (Dresden, Germany), and Verein für Volkskunde (Vienna, Austria). The network comprised of approximately 30 scholars from across Europe, culminating in three seminal meetings in 1995 and 1996 in Le Creusot, France, in Dresden, Germany and in Vienna, Austria, respectively. The project work was finalized in the book *La Fabrique des Héros*, edited by Pierre Centlivres, Daniel Fabre and Françoise Zonabend, and published by the Mission du Patrimoine ethnologique in 1998.

Between 1998 and 2001, I was a member of the coordinating committee for the Nordic research network and project 'Folklore, Heritage Politics, and Ethnic Diversity'. While the network received funding from the Nordic Academy of Advanced Study (NorFa), the Joint Committee of the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities (NOS-H) financed my own research. In addition to these two organizations and their generosity, I wish to express my appreciation to our networkers of many nationalities as well as my fellow members in the steering group: Academy Professor Anna-Leena Siikala; Professor Barbro Klein, Director at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences (SCASSS) in Uppsala, Sweden; and Associate Professor Stein R. Mathisen at Finnmark College in Alta, Norway. The work of the network and project is well represented in two books. *Folklore, Heritage Politics, and Ethnic Diversity: A Festschrift for Barbro Klein* was published in 2000 by the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka, Sweden. The second book, *Creating Diversities: Folklore, Religion and the Politics of Heritage*, was published in 2004 in the Studia Fennica Folkloristica series.

For three months in the fall of 1999, I had the pleasure to work as a guest researcher at the Centre for the Study of European Civilization (Senter for Europeiske Kulturstudier, SEK) at the University of Bergen in Norway. I hereby wish to express my gratitude to Professor Siri Meyer for inviting me to participate in the SEK project 'Det Nye' (The New). From among the many colleagues in Bergen, I especially wish to thank Professors Bente Alver and Torunn Selberg at the Department of Cultural Studies and History of Art (Institutt for Kulturstudier og Kunsthistorie, IKK). My thanks also go to the initiator of my visit, Line Alice Ytrehus, and her husband Hans-Jakob Ågotnes. Since the beginning of 2001, I have been able to concentrate full-

time on my research as an Academy Research Fellow at the Academy of Finland. I thank the Research Council for Culture and Society at the Academy for granting me this position, and Academy Professor Anna-Leena Siikala for including me in her group of researchers in the project 'Myth, History, Society. Ethnic/National Traditions in the Age of Globalisation'.

In addition to those already mentioned, I wish to thank the following persons for being sources of inspiration, support and recognition: my wife Mikako Iwatake (University of Helsinki), my brother Veikko Anttonen (University of Turku), Pasi Saukkonen (University of Helsinki), Leila Virtanen, Lotte Tarkka, Ulla-Maija Peltonen and Laura Stark (University of Helsinki), Senni Timonen (Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives in Helsinki), Seppo Knuuttila (University of Joensuu), Jorma Kalela (University of Turku), Bo Lönnqvist (University of Jyväskylä), Roger D. Abrahams (University of Pennsylvania), Alan Dundes (University of California, Berkeley), Orvar Löfgren and Jonas Frykman (University of Lund), Regina Bendix (Universität Göttingen), and Ülo Valk (University of Tartu).

An earlier version of Chapter 1 was published as 'Folklore, Modernity, and Postmodernism: A Theoretical Overview' in *Nordic Frontiers: Recent Issues in Modern Traditional Culture in the Nordic Countries*, edited by Pertti J. Anttonen and Reimund Kvideland. NIF Publications No. 27. Pp. 17–33. Turku: Nordic Institute of Folklore, 1993. Chapter 5 was first published as 'Nationalism, Ethnicity, and the Making of Antiquities as a Strategy in Cultural Representation' in *Suomen Antropologi – Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 1/1994 (vol. 19/1): 19–42. It has been revised. Chapter 6 was first published as 'Introduction: Tradition and Political Identity' in *Making Europe in Nordic Contexts*, edited by Pertti J. Anttonen. NIF Publications No. 35. Pp. 7–40. Turku: Nordic Institute of Folklore, 1996. It has been revised and it also contains material from the article 'Nationalism in the Face of National and Transnational Integration and European Union Federalism', published in *Identities in Transition: Perspectives on Cultural Interaction and Integration*, edited by Jarmo Kervinen, Anu Korhonen, Keijo Virtanen. Publications of the Doctoral Program on Cultural Interaction and Integration. Pp. 67–84. Turku: Turun yliopisto, 1996.

Chapter 7 was first published as 'What is Globalization?' in *Norveg, Journal of Norwegian Folklore* 1/1999 (Vol. 42): 3–18. It has been revised. Chapter 8 was first published as 'Cultural Homogeneity and the National Unification of a Political Community' in *Folklore, Heritage Politics, and Ethnic Diversity: A Festschrift for Barbro Klein*, edited by Pertti J. Anttonen in collaboration with Anna-Leena Siikala, Stein R. Mathisen and Leif Magnusson. Pp. 253–278. Botkyrka, Sweden: Multicultural Centre, 2000. It has been revised. Chapter 9 was first published as 'Folklore, History, and 'the Story of Finland' in the book *Dynamics of Tradition: Perspectives on Oral Poetry and Folk Belief. Essays in Honour of Anna-Leena Siikala on her 60th Birthday 1st January 2003*, edited by Lotte Tarkka. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 13. Pp. 48–66. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003. The revised version also contains material from the article 'Tradition, Modernity and Otherness: On the Political Role of History, Ethnic Diversity and 'Folk Tradition' in the Making

of Modern Finland', published in *Forestillinger om 'den andre': Images of Otherness*, edited by Line Alice Ytrehus. Pp. 58–83. Kristiansand, Norway: HøyskoleForlaget / Norwegian Academic Press, 2001.

Despite the fact that most of the chapters are based on previously published articles, this book is not an anthology. The chapters are meant to form a monographic entity consisting of a theoretical foundation and an empirical application aiming to formulate a general argument concerning the topic in question, the concepts of tradition and modernity in folklore scholarship and the historically specific, sociopolitical context of its practice. I thank the two anonymous referees for the valuable insights that helped me finalize the textual framework. I also thank Leila Virtanen for checking the language and Maria Vasenkari for compiling the name index. I am honored to have the book published by the Finnish Literature Society in the *Studia Fennica* series.

Helsinki, 22 June 2004.
Pertti J. Anttonen

A Short Introduction

Discussing the concept of ‘nation’, Eric Hobsbawm points out that “concepts are not part of free-floating philosophical discourse, but socially, historically and locally rooted, and must be explained in terms of these realities” (Hobsbawm 1990: 9). One of the main purposes of this book is to apply this proposition to the idea and concept of tradition, especially in the ways in which it has been used and circulated in folklore scholarship. In taking up this task, I wish to continue the ‘tradition’ well represented in Finnish folklore studies by Jouko Hautala: the examination of scholarly concepts (see Hautala 1957).

When studying social practices that are regarded as traditional, we must reflect upon what we mean by traditional, which is usually seen as an element of meaning in the practices that we are studying. Whose meaning is it? Is it a meaning generated by those who study tradition or those who are being studied? In both cases, particular criteria for traditionality are employed, whether these are explicated or not. The individuals, groups of people and institutions that are studied may continue to uphold their traditions or name their practices traditions without having to state in analytical terms their criteria for traditionality. The political charge inscribed in the idea of tradition does not require the explication of its cultural logics. This is a familiar phenomenon from classic nationalism and the use of traditions to legitimate the consolidation of territorial and administrative control. In recent decades, the notion of tradition has gained attention for being introduced in postcolonial arenas as a political strategy for creating (or inventing) a past that serves to legitimate aspirations for indigenous rights (see e.g. Linnekin 1983; Keesing 1989; Briggs 1996).

The licence to keep the criteria for traditionality inexplicit cannot apply to people who make the study of traditions their profession. This especially concerns those engaged in the academic field of the ‘science of tradition,’ a paraphrase given to folklore studies (e.g. Honko 1983; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1996: 252). Although interest in oral tradition, as I have written elsewhere, “usually means interest in the specimens of oral tradition, the scholarly study of oral tradition cannot do without analytical reflection on the theories of tradition and traditionality that are applied in the selection, construction, and representation of such specimens” (Anttonen 2003: 116–117). Traditions call

for explanation, instead of being merely described or *used* as explanations for apparent repetitions, reiterations, replications, continuations or symbolic linking in social practice, values, meaning, culture, and history. In order to explain the concept of tradition and the category of the traditional, we must situate its use in particular historically specific discourses – ways of knowing, speaking, conceptualization and representation – in which social acts receive their meanings as traditional.

Obviously, I do not presume to be the first to draw analytical attention to the concept of tradition. Important works have been written on the subject not only in folklore studies but also in anthropology, sociology, history and philosophy. In folklore, as mentioned by Regina Bendix, tradition is “a core term” (Bendix 2002: 110). Richard Bauman writes that “Few concepts have played a more central role in the development and practice of anthropology than tradition” (Bauman 2001: 15819). In folklore studies, the coreness of this concept means that it is frequently used to both denote and qualify the folklorists’ research object, oral traditions and traditional culture. But it becomes apparent in Bendix’s discussion that the idea of coreness may also come to mean that the concept is somehow the property of the folklorists, as if marked by their inherited ownership. She writes that a mixture of “unease and amazement pervaded in the early 1980s” when *Tradition* by the sociologist Edward Shils (1981) and *The Invention of Tradition* by the historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) attracted wide attention, but “Neither book acknowledged folklorists’ extensive work on, or perhaps more accurately, *with* the concept of ‘tradition’” (Bendix 2002: 110). Bendix may have a point in lamenting the tendency that “the labors and insights of the small discipline of folklore” seem to go unnoticed by representatives of other fields (see also Ben-Amos 1998: 272). But I wish to put more stress on the last comment in the quotation, which suggests that the concept of tradition is in frequent use in the vocabulary of folklorists, but to a much lesser degree in the focus of their scholarly analysis.

In taking up the agenda of studying tradition here, my purpose is not semantic, in the sense of mapping out the various ways in which the concept has been, can be or should be used. Instead, the approach that I have adopted emerges from an interest in epistemology and phenomenology, on the one hand, and political analysis, on the other. My starting point is that the concept of tradition is inseparable from the idea and experience of modernity, both as its discursively constructed opposition and as a rather modern metaphor for cultural continuity and historical patterning. For this reason, the discussion of the concept of tradition as well as those social processes that are regarded as traditional must be related to and contextualized within the socially constituted discourses on modernity and modernism.

The same applies to the concept of folklore, which especially in folklore scholarship conducted in languages other than English is commonly, and often without methodological reflection, treated as a synonym for the concept of tradition. Folklore as a Western and English-language concept has its foundation in the modern interest in objectifying the past and the non-modern, both temporally and spatially defined, and in documenting and conserving

selected types of communication discovered in that cultural otherness. In the course of this documentation and conservation process, representations are produced mainly in entextualized form in literary collections, to be kept in such modern institutions as museums, archives and universities.

To call such representations traditions is a discursive practice that operates with particular criteria for traditionality, such as those incorporated into the discourse on nationalism, heritage, indigenous rights, or the taxonomy of folklore genres. This may – possibly intentionally – limit the discussion on traditionality to those phenomena that are classified as folklore and/or incorporated into the political rhetoric of heritage making. My preference, however, is to contextualize the folkloristic use of the idea and concept of tradition in a variety of other discourses on tradition. I realize that this is a larger undertaking to which this book can only provide a small contribution.

I wish to emphasize that my discussion on the concepts of tradition and folklore do not strive to formulate a theory of tradition, which has been called for by Pascal Boyer (1990). I am more concerned here with the constitution of the category of tradition within the discourse on the modern than in a cognitive analysis of repetition. I also wish to emphasize that I am not taking a stand in the debate concerning the so-called crisis of the field of folklore, regarding its institutional marginalization, the constraints and negative connotations of its name, and the gap between the name and its present-day scholarly signification (Bendix 1998; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998a). I would contend that folklore is a rhetorical construction that has possibly outlived its modernist agenda, but still, I see its value in identifying a discursive field that makes the production of tradition and traditionality its main target of scientific analysis. Surely, its best legacies could be continued under a different name, but as a particular type of a modernist project, folklore lives and dies with the term.

Regarding my approach in discussing tradition as a category constituted within discourse on the modern, I wish to emphasize that it is not my aim to argue for the newness of that which has been claimed old, or to argue for the inauthenticity of that which has been claimed authentic. I have not set out to reveal misconceptions or ‘myths’. I align myself with the so-called Hobsbawmian perspective in considering traditions as modern constructions, attributed to Hobsbawm because of his seminal book, but this perspective by no means applies literally to everything that is defined or researched as traditions. Many of the selected cultural products and practices that are studied in folklore scholarship and conserved in textual representations have a long history behind them. Their circulation is not necessarily a modern invention.

I will, however, argue that since the concepts of tradition and modern are fundamentally modern, what they aim to and are able to describe, report and denote is epistemologically modern, as that which is regarded as non-modern and traditional is appropriated into modern social knowledge through modern concepts and discursive means. While modernity, according to the classic tenet, destroys tradition, it – epistemologically speaking – creates tradition and makes tradition a modern product. For this reason, both tradition and its representation are modern, even if they signify that which is not modern.

Modernity cannot represent non-modernity without modern mediation, which therefore makes the representations of non-modernity also modern. In other words, that which is regarded – and literally, gazed at – as a specimen of non-modern traditionality does not receive its cultural meanings merely from its own history. As an object of modern study, such a specimen is inseparable from modern discourses on non-modernity. Since non-modernity can only be discussed as modernity's otherness, modern discourses on non-modernity are at the same time modern discourses on modernity. Hence the title: tradition through modernity.

Part 1
The Modernness of the Non-Modern

In their study of social practices deemed traditional, scholars tend to use the concept and idea of tradition as an element of meaning in the practices under investigation. But just whose meaning is it? Is it a meaning generated by those who study tradition or those whose traditions are being studied? In both cases, particular criteria for traditionality are employed, whether these are explicated or not. Individuals and groups will no doubt continue to uphold their traditional practices or refer to their practices as traditional. While they are in no way obliged to explicate in analytical terms their criteria for traditionality, the same cannot be said for those who make the study of traditions their profession. In scholarly analysis, traditions need to be explained instead of used as explanations for apparent repetitions and replications or symbolic linking in social practice, values, history, and heritage politics.

This book takes a closer look at 'tradition' and 'folklore' in order to conceptualize them within discourses on modernity and modernism. The first section discusses 'modern' and 'traditional' as modern concepts and the study of folklore as a modern trajectory. The underlying tenet here is that non-modernity cannot be represented without modern mediation, which therefore makes the representations of non-modernity epistemologically modern. The second section focuses on the nation-state of Finland and the nationalistic use of folk traditions in the discursive production of Finnish modernity and its Others. The insights are applicable worldwide in discussions on cultural representation.



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