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SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Traditionism

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Abstract: This essay aims at conceptualizing—and naming—a certain, rather popular, stance toward tradition, that fits neither of the polar opposites of the secularist–rationalist vs. religious–conservative dichotomy. Arguing that this stance should be viewed as a "stranger" (following Zygmunt Bauman's conceptualization of the term) that challenges and threatens the binary constructs which are central to positivist notions of modernity, tradition, and secularism (such as the "modern vs. traditional" and "religious vs. secular" binaries), the essay highlights the ways in which this stance embodies a more nuanced understanding of the very concept of tradition. The essay does so by both studying the phenomenology of this stance (both conceptually and through the socio-historical case of its appearance in a Jewish–Israeli context), and developing a view of tradition that transcends the above-mentioned dichotomies. It also highlights the distinction between this stance and another, dominant phenomenon of professed loyalty to tradition, namely conservatism.

Subjects: Political Philosophy; Sociology of Knowledge; Sociology of Religion

Keywords: tradition; modernity; secularism; conservatism; post-secular

1. Introduction

How do you call that stance—often taken by the majority of people in given societies—which can be identified neither as secularist–rationalism nor as religious–conservatism? Although this matter is somewhat obscure (it has seldom received the attentions of social scientists, even when it has been apparent that the "generic" religious vs. secular dichotomy they often employ in order to study their objects of research fails to capture significant segments of these objects), it is nevertheless of crucial urgency; for, as attested to by several penetrating interpretations of secularism, religion, and modernity, the dichotomous worldview encouraged by the exclusivity of the two above-mentioned polar opposite is both empirically misleading and ethically questionable.[1]

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yaacov Yadgar (PhD, Bar-Ilan University, 2000) studies issues of politics, ethnicity, national identity, and political culture with an emphasis on Jewish–Israeli identity. His two most recent books: Secularism and Religion in Jewish–Israeli Politics: Traditionist and Modernity (Routledge, 2011) and Beyond Secularization: Traditionism and Critique of Secularism in Israel (In Hebrew, Van-Leer, 2012). A recent article of his, titled "Tradition" (Human Studies 2013, 36: 451–470) may be viewed as a companion to "Traditionism."

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

How do you call the general stance toward tradition, which fits neither the secularist–rationalist model nor the religious–conservative one? This essay aims at identifying and analyzing this stance, which in many societies is in actuality taken by the majority of people. Naming it "traditionism," the essay presents a phenomenological study of this stance. It offers a general conceptualization of traditionism, as well as a consideration of a specific case study of it (in a Jewish–Israeli context). The essay argues that a careful appreciation of this stance demands that we overcome the dominance of certain binary distinctions, such as the "modern vs. traditional" and "religious vs. secular."

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Of course, some individuals do indeed find themselves comfortable identifying with one "pole" or the other; But as Taylor (2007, p. 431) pointedly notes, most people do not identify with either pole, and choose to conduct themselves somewhere along the continuum suggested by these poles; "people take up a stance of this kind in a field which is polarized by the two extreme perspectives; they define themselves in relation to the polar opposites, whereas the people in the polar opposition don't return the favour, but usually define themselves in relation to each other, ignoring the middle (or abusively assimilating it to the other side)." Similarly, Casanova's (1994, p. 38) denunciation of the "classic" theory of secularization, addressing primarily the American case but surely transcending it, highlights the futility of this tendency to let the polar opposites define the field in its entirety: "We may say with some confidence that currently, at least in America, both religious 'fundamentalist' and fundamentalist 'secular humanists' are cognitive minorities, that the majority of Americans tend to be humanists, who are simultaneously religious and secular. The theory of secularization should be reformulated in such a way that this empirical reality ceases to be a paradox."

One way to promote such a theoretical reformulation might be, I would argue, an explication of the stance or attitude (not a "category," for this might impose a narrow a view of an apparently complex and varied stance) that both Taylor and Casanova allude to and which both nevertheless neglect to name.

The act of naming, as both a promulgation of such theoretical explication and a conclusion of it, is a tricky game indeed. For while, it is quite apparent that the matter at hand has to do with this "silent majority's" essentially positive yet not-absolutist attitude toward tradition, most common names associated with tradition have already been "appropriated" by the secularization discourse. "Traditional," probably the favorable contender, has been constructed as the opposite of "modern," annulling in a crucial sense our ability to identify someone or something as both modern and traditional (a characteristic which, I would argue, is nevertheless true of the discussed "middle ground" or "silent majority"). "Traditionalism," another obvious contender, on the other hand, is often used to denote a conservative, or even ultra-conservative stance (often used as an alternative to the now undermined "fundamentalism"), that while acknowledged to be modern (in essence, it manifests an obviously modern act of a rejection of secularization) nevertheless commends an absolutist sense of tradition's authority—hence, once again, fails to capture the nuanced stance toward tradition practiced by this "silent"—or rather, "unnamed"—majority.

In what follows I will suggest that a neologism, "Traditionism," which was originally suggested as a somewhat narrow solution to a translational problem (it was offered as a translation to a commonly used Israeli-Hebrew term, *masortiyut*, which is also derived from Hebrew for tradition, *masoret* (see Yadgar, 2011a, 2011b); More on this below), can both be used as an at least temporary name for the matter at hand and function as a concept enabling the promulgation of the theoretical realignment called for by a critical assessment of the secularization discourse.

I

Traditionism is a dialogical (yet surely not equal) stance in relation to tradition; it is a concept that denotes an individual's or a community's loyal yet reflective—favorable and even sanctifying "in principle" yet interpretive, critical and selective in practice—attitude toward what they view as the tradition that constitutes their identity, that is: constitutes them as subjects.

As such, traditionism, or a traditionist stance, embodies a certain understanding of the concept of tradition, as well as an interpretive and phenomenological argument regarding the viable and desirable nature of the relationship between tradition and its bearers. Of course, traditionism might do so without gaining a "systematic" and "philosophical" articulation; In which case, it would be wiser to identify it as a practice that manifests the said attitude, understanding, and interpretation. Needless to say, a traditionist stance can also be held by individuals and communities who do not self-identify by the title "traditionist" or similar instances of the same concept.

Contrary to what its name might connote, traditionism is not an a-modern phenomenon. Moreover, traditionism gains its most critical formation and elucidation as against competing modern understandings and interpretations of tradition. In the context of the dominance enjoyed by the narrative of modernization and secularization in certain academic and political circles, these contesting, competing modern understandings of tradition can be labeled (taking into account the unavoidable crudeness of such an act of labeling), respectively, as secular rationalism and orthodox or romanticist conservatism.

Now, these latter two stances are often constructed and understood as the exclusive and exhaustive oppositional poles in the framework of the said narrative, as the dual, opposing organs of the "friend vs. enemy" binary construct; and, at the same time, they deny both the ambivalence characteristic of modernity (Bauman, 1990; Latour, 1993) as well as of them, its products, and their mutual construction of a social unit around this binarism. In this context, traditionism is revealed to be a "stranger," whose stance in relation to this social unit is defined by the fact of being a "late-comer", who "imports qualities into [the social unit], which do not and cannot stem from the group itself" (Simmel, 1950, p. 402). The stranger's presence disrupts the binary construct and threatens it:

> [The stranger] calls the bluff of the opposition between friends and enemies as the complete mappa mundi, as the difference which consumes all differences and hence leaves nothing outside itself. As that opposition is the foundation on which all social life and all differences which patch and hold it together rest, the stranger saps social life itself. And all this because the stranger is neither friend nor enemy; and because he may be both [...] The stranger is one (perhaps the main one, the archetypal one) member of the family of undecidable—those baffling yet ubiquitous unities that, in Derrida's (1983) words [...] "can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, resisting and disordering it, without ever constituting a third term [...]." (Bauman, 1990, p. 145)

Inside the epistemological framework of the modernization and secularization thesis, traditionism is indeed viewed as one of these "Undecidables, who are all *neither/nor*, that is, simultaneously, *either/or*" (Bauman, 1990, p. 146); or it might be more correct to say that they are both *this and that*, since as they are neither of the two, "they may be all" (Bauman, 1990, p. 146).

Traditionism thus creates confusion by challenging the way in which both sides of the said binary structure understand tradition, and by undermining the historical narrative they tell. Note that the use of the singular (*a* way of understanding tradition, *a* historical narrative that is common to both sides) is in place here, since at the base of the opposition "rationalism/secularism" vs. "conservatism/religiosity" there in effect lies an agreement regarding the allegedly eternal, fixed, total, and uncompromising character of tradition, as well as regarding a narrative of a supposed historical "rupture" between modernity and tradition. The disagreement between the two sides is focused on the required attitude of the individual and the community toward that supposed "sealed package," which had been passed to them from the past, and on their proper reaction to the aforementioned historical rupture: Shall we accept tradition's sovereignty (and the sovereignty of its authoritative interprets) over our life in a total fashion, such that it seems to annul the subject's self-reflexivity (if not even subjectivity itself), while continuously trying to "mend" the said rupture by "jumping over" it back to the authenticity that is forever ingrained in the past? Or should we celebrate this rupture and question anything offered to us by tradition, rebel against tradition and declare our independence from it as we reaffirm our sovereignty as modern, rational, reflexive subjects?

This tacit agreement regarding tradition's character and the historical narrative that shapes our stance vis-à-vis tradition is supposed to be the "methodical," systematic, and "clean" basis of the categorical distinction between the two supposedly coherent organs—"rationalism/secularism" vs. "conservatism/religiosity." However, much like other binary ghost structures erected by modernity, this one is also based on self-denial and illusion (at the base of which, I shall argue, is a denial of the dynamic, dialogical, constitutive, and unavoidable character of tradition); and this binary structure is what creates, or at least marks, the stranger that is "traditionism."

In other words, much like other strangers, so is traditionism, as an attitude and as a concept (but not, however, as practice; it would be utterly wrong to deny the possibility that what we would today identify as a traditionist practice existed also in previous historical contexts) a product of a modern construction, since it emerges out of the dominance of the said bipolar/oppositional discourse. Like other strangers, so does traditionism become threatening by its very being sort of a mutation of the allegedly coherent order, and modernity—through its categorical creations—behaves towards it in ways that quite obviously breach the high principles which it advertises as its own guiding values. As Taylor (2007, p. 432) notes in the quote above, although there is still a minority of people who do indeed self-identify with, or by, the two opposites that define this binary, most people usually do not identify with either of the oppositional poles, and instead prefer to identify, or simply to conduct their way of life, somewhere inside the space that is eventually created between the two poles (or, better, to "move around" inside this space, according to the changing conditions of their life).

These "strangers" are hence pushed into disadvantaged positions inside a field whose rules and conditions are dictated by the two polar identities, who self-define in relation to each other, often as the total opposite of each other. Those who find themselves inside the "middle" that is both and at the same time suggested and denied by the bipolar opposition, define their identities in relation to the oppositional poles, who are dominant by virtue of them being those who set the outline and rules of the field. In contrast, the polar-oppositional identity constructs tend to ignore the space outside of the poles, or to try and "assimilate" this non-polar and non-extremist "middle" into one of the oppositional poles. In this sense, the polar oppositions define the field, which does not allow for the articulation of systems of culture, values, and identities of those who do not align with either of the poles.

Like other strangers, so does traditionism create an interpretive confusion, as it disrupts the cognitive clarity, that same rigid and coherent categorization, and undermines the assurance and clarity of action that this coherence was supposed to facilitate. The combination of its intimate familiarity with both sides of the polar opposition with its implicitly critical stance towards them—its stance "between friend and enemy, order and chaos, the inside and the outside" (Bauman, 1990, p. 151)—is taken to be a disrupting contamination (see also Douglas, 1966). Nevertheless, the stranger enjoys a unique, critical point of view (an "objective" one, in Simmel's terminology), which derives for the fact that he is not absolutely bound by the group's unique tendencies and properties.

Obviously, the dominant political-social-cultural binary construct at hand—which we often identify with such terms as "modernity," "secularism" and "rationalism"—is in the first place that which creates the "anomaly," the disruption of the order—that is: the stranger. This order is that which brings to life the incongruity between its binarism and the rich, pluralist, complex reality:

> No binary classification deployed in the construction of order can fully overlap with essentially non-discrete, continuous experience of reality. The opposition, born of the horror of ambiguity, becomes the main source of ambivalence. The enforcement of any classification means inevitably production of anomalies (this is, phenomena which are perceived as "anomalous" only as far as they span the categories whose staying apart is the meaning of the order). (Bauman, 1990, p. 151)

Like other strangers, so has traditionism received the familiar, easy treatment offered by modernity to those "undecidables," as positivist social science suggested that we should view traditionism not as a phenomenon that undermines the validity of the binary construct and of the epistemology from which it emerged, but rather as a case of the "not-yet classified." Accordingly, positivist science professed additional study and analysis and "improved" the system of categorization and labeling so as to contain traditionism inside the known structure built around the constitutive binarism, while at the same time "explaining away" traditionism as a "residual category," or as a midpoint between the two constitutive poles (a midpoint that is by definition constructed by the dichotomous opposition they constitute).

As the same time, traditionism is subjected to the crushing power of the other, "heavier" solution—that is: the nation state, with its ethno-national, supposedly secular order that it enforces as an alternative to preceding orders. This order redraws the lines distinguish enemies from friends while also attempting to blur the ambivalence by inventing a new nativist identity and to force the statist identity and its system of classification on everyone present in its domain (Bauman, 1990, p. 154). In this sense, traditionism, with it stubborn insistence to survive (as do many other strangers), might be understood as a failure of the statist program of enforced homogeneity.[2]

To be sure, contrary to the predictions made by the positivist social sciences, and in opposition to the explicit aims of certain statist educational projects and cultural practices, traditionism has not dissolved into the "coherent" poles, and remains a viable alternative to the order they construct. And thus, through its persistent, stubborn questioning of the way tradition is understood by the two dominant polar oppositions, traditionism proves to be more than a stranger who is yet to be "decided." Rather, it is a stranger who in principle cannot be classified and categorized through the epistemology of secularization and modernization. Traditionism is in a sense "that 'third element' which should not be" (Bauman, 1990, p. 148).

II

A suspension of the conceptual discussion so as to make room for a consideration of one explication of a traditionist stance, that of Jewish-Israelis who self-identify as "*masortim*" (singular: *masorti*, deriving from *masoret*, Hebrew for tradition) would be in place here.[3] More specifically, the sources of the Israeli-Hebrew name "*masortiyut*" (i.e. traditionism), and its history should be carefully examined.

This "category," as the name is commonly used today in Israeli Hebrew discourse, was born exactly out of the discontent caused by the "incongruity" between sociocultural reality and certain dominant political and "scientistic" notions, which culminate in the narrative of secularization and modernization. That is, it was aimed at "solving" the "inconsistent" nature of the lifestyle practiced by many Israeli-Jews, who observe certain practices that are commonly considered to be "religious," while nevertheless failing to observe a "full" and "authentic" religious lifestyle, or, for that matter, to even self-identify as "religious." Or, viewed from the other pole, these Israeli-Jews seem to be "confusing" by taking an active, involved part in secular life, while nevertheless not subscribing to an "authentic" secular lifestyle (as they, after all, nevertheless do observe those "religious" practices). In short, these Israeli-Jews fail to adhere to any of the "consistent" categories offered by the secularization discourse, that is, either that of the religious–conservatism or that of secularism. They were hence named "*masorti-yim*," or "traditional," denoting that they do have something to do with practice that is rooted in tradition, but are nevertheless not doing so in a consistent, "religious" way.

This "traditionality" in practice was initially viewed as rooted in the considered group's "pre-modern" character: The group's enduring yet "inconsistent" ties to religion were seen as "evidence" that the group has yet to "modernize" (hence, also, to secularize). This usage of the term "*masorti*" constructed it as a direct translation of the English term "traditional," signifying those who are "not-modern" or "pre-modern": "*Masortiyut*" in other words, first emerged in Jewish–Israeli discourse as a name denoting the quality of being not-modern.[4]

Hence, the Jewish–Israeli setting first saw the usage of the term "*masorti*," or "traditionist," not necessarily as part of an identity discourse/construct, and surely not out of an attempt at identifying the complex nature of tradition and of our relation to it, but rather as a product of the secularization and modernization project, that seeks to distinguish in that same bipolar manner the "pre-modern" from the "modern." Notably, the "traditional" or "pre-modern"—that which has not gone through a process of modernization—is understood in this context to be characterized, among other things, by religiosity and by a submissive, non-reflexive relation to tradition.

This, then, is the context in which the term "*masorti*" was coined to denote a large group of late-comers, "strangers," namely *Mizrahim* (Jews who originate from non-European, mostly Muslim

countries), who arrived at the Israeli political and cultural arenas only after that dichotomous distinction separating friends from enemies had already been established. (Nourishing on certain historical developments within European Jewish history, this distinction has set the "secular nationalists" ["modern," Zionists] and Orthodox-religious ["pre-modern," mostly non-Zionist] as the polar opposites supposedly defining the Jewish filed in its entirety.) These late-comers, who did not fit into this polarity, were understood to be "somewhere along" the path of progress, which is bound to lead them away from pre-modern religiosity toward modernity and (nationalist) secularity; the issue of why they have yet to complete this transformation and how to "enable" its successful completion, thus became a matter of scientific inquiry and public policy.

In this incarnation of the term, "*masortiyut*" was used at times as sort of a politically correct alternative to "primitivism." In any event, this usage of the term instilled it rather "naturally" with a sense of a preeminent "redemption" of the "*masortiyim*" (that is, the "traditional," as an adjective denoting those who are characterized by, or through tradition; in other words: the "non-modern"), in the form of their liberation from the yoke of tradition. It also brought to life various projects and policies (both academic and political-Statist in nature) which were aimed at "marching" *masortiyim* "forward," towards their final assimilation into secular nationalism and Israeli "modernity" (or, alternatively, towards their "retreat" into the enclave of the conservative/religious community, were they were expected to observe that "authentic" religious lifestyle).

This term was later realigned, shifting from the realm of a socio-historiographical discussion on modernization toward its complementary organ—that is, the secularization discourse. In this context, the term was used to identify those who did not fully fit into the "religious vs. secular" dichotomy, which has come to be viewed as a main axis around which the Jewish–Israeli society is established: "*Masorti*" had become a label used by researchers and surveyors, and following them also their respondents, to mark their non-secularist yet non-conservative–religious stances on issues pertaining to Jewish identity, belief, and practice. In its "scientific" usages, the term still carried the presuppositions of the modernization and secularization thesis: the stances of these Israeli-Jews on issues of Jewish identity were perceived as characterized by pre-modernity, if not even as inherently pre-modern.

This brings to light the problematic nature characterizing the usage of the term "*masortiyut*," or "traditionism" (or any other potential translation of the term, for that matter), by those who wish to study the traditionist/*masorti* stance and the wide array of identities constructed around it in a positive manner, such that would enable us to understand these as independent and positively meaningful: That is, without viewing this stance-identity as inherently dependent upon the binary construct of the "secular-religious cleavage" and/or upon the misleading dichotomy separating modernity from tradition.

To a large extent, the Hebrew term "*masortiyut*" was born out of an attempt (an academic and political one at that) to force the religiosity of *Mizrahim* into the dichotomous straitjacket of a binary epistemology that fails to facilitate an understanding of their social, cultural, and political worlds. As put by a sympathetic student of Israeli *Mizrahim*, the term "*masortiyut*" has become "an epistemological and ideological prosthetic":

> The *Mizrahi* religious practice—on its varying hues—have not succumbed to the opposition between "religion" and "secularism," and have kept on disrupting it. Hence, in order to avoid a disruption of the known Western oppositions between religion and secularism and between Western-ness and Eastern-ness—which are part of the civilizing discourse of European colonialism—researchers and intellectuals forced the *Mizrahi* religious practice into the well-known opposition, and set a place for it inside this opposition, between the two poles. Thus was invented the category of "*masortiyut*," as characterizing the religiosity of the *Mizrahim*. The category *masirtiyut* is an epistemological and ideological prosthesis, that more than explaining *Mizrahi* religion reveals the ideological stance of those making the definition and the status of the distinction inside modern Zionism. The religiosity of *Mizrahim* did not

fit nicely into the accepted set of oppositions that was imported from Europe. Instead of creating a third sphere from which *Mizrahi* religion might be described, the invention of *Mizrahi* "tradition" (which was seen as oppositional to modernity) enabled its introduction into a known and controllable European continuum. (Shenhav, 2003, p. 117; my translation. See also 2006, pp. 77–80)

However, a significant, meaningful (that is, pertaining to the meaning associated with the term) gap has opened up at this point: Those same objects of research, those "respondents," have begun using the names "*masorti*" (=traditionist) and "*masurtiyut*" (=traditionism) in a positive manner—neither as signifiers of the "remnants of primitivism" they allegedly carry, nor as a characteristic that define their place inside the narrow scheme of the "modernity vs. primitivism" cleavage, but rather as names that describe their self-image as loyal yet reflexive carriers of tradition.

In other words, for many Jewish-Israelis, the use of the names "*masorti*/traditionist" and "*masorti-yut*/traditionism" had become sort of a discursive tactic of avoiding the labeling forced upon them by the binary order of the modern (secular) national-state: They do not identify with either of the labels "secular" or "religious," and demand to be identified a "simply Jewish; *masoritm*."[5]

The "positive" usage of the term *masorti*/traditionist—i.e. the usage made by those who employ it in order to distinguish their Jewish identity and their stance toward tradition—gains further explication as it transcends the "scientific" usages of the same term. In other words, even if the sources of this name are problematic, we can portray a process in which it has been appropriated and charged with new, positive meaning, as Jewish-Israelis, mostly *Mizrahim*, have shaped traditionism, or "*masortiyut*"— practically (i.e. as practice), although not always ideologically—as that same "new, third sphere," which presents its own interpretation of the sociopolitical reality. Namely, it does not succumb to the modernization and secularization discourse on matters of religion, tradition, modernity and identity.

In other words, the term "*masortiyut*" has been appropriated by those who identify with "that 'third element' which should not be," that "foreign" stance in the world of the modernization and secularization discourse, on matters pertaining to their relationship to tradition. Doing so, they identified not only the lacuna in the scientific and political discourse on the issues of tradition, its authority and the attitudes of its carriers toward tradition, but also the need to name the array of stances that they practice or embody. Clearly, this naming, as "*masortiyut*" in Hebrew and "traditionism" in English, as I am suggesting here, necessitates further clarification; which is my aim below.

III

One of the more fruitful ways to understand traditionism and the challenges it poses against the binary conceptions of the modernization and secularization discourse is to trace the ways in which traditionism suggests we should understand and interpret the concept of tradition and the phenomenology of loyalty to tradition. I would argue that as part of clarifying the traditionist stance we should also return to the notion of tradition, and free it from the image imposed on it by the modernization and secularization discourse.

Such a reconsideration of the concept of tradition shall primarily emphasize tradition's constitutive role and our dialogical attitude toward it. From this point of view, tradition is revealed to function an infrastructure or a "language" into which one is born, and through which one grows and matures, forms as a member of her community, becomes aware of the world surrounding her, and is, ultimately, constituted as a subject. Tradition is ever contemporary—contrary to the image prevalent among both sides of the "secular vs. religious" rift, which portray tradition as a frozen—or "eternal"— relic of the past, the character, content, and in some formulations even the meaning of which are set and sealed. Tradition is both and at the same time that which enables us to comprehend reality and interpret it, and that which sets the limits and horizons of these comprehension and interpretation. Through its symbolic and institutional structures, tradition shapes social, cultural, and political reality and instills it with meaning.

But it is far from being a sealed, eternal, and unequivocal dictation; tradition's carriers are its interpreters. Their practice, with its roots in tradition, is a manifestation of what I referred to earlier as the "dialogical" attitude of the carriers of tradition to the tradition that constitutes them. This practice is a continuous, ever-developing process of interpretation and updating of the meaning, and even content, of tradition. Moreover, this practice is an essential precondition for the existence and survival of tradition: This "language" exists only through its speakers (and it constitutes them as it provides them with the symbolic tools necessary for the construction and comprehension of their subjectivity and their place in the world), and their speech, or usage of this language, constitutes a continuous updating and interpretation of this language.

This understanding of tradition, or at least strong currents of its main notions (bearing various, divergent labels), is to be found, among others, in Wittgenstein's (1968, 1969) discussion of "forms of life," "inherited background" and "rule governed" behavior; in Geertz' (esp. 1973) post-Wittgensteinian argument that human thought is inherently public and in his corresponding reconstruction of "culture"; in Polanyi's (1946, 1958) notion of "tacit knowledge"; in Kuhn's (1962, 1977) idea of "paradigm"; in Oakeshott's (1991) highlighting of the role of "traditional knowledge"; and in Taylor's (esp. 1971, 1985) emphasis on "intersubjective meaning" and "language" for the understanding of humanity; it also receives a most comprehensive and systematic formulation in the thought of Gadamer (1976, 1979, 1989) and MacIntyre (1984, 1988, 1991). In addition, this understanding of the notion of tradition can be also found in the works of major social scientists, such as Shils (1981, 1997) and Eisenstadt (1972, 1973).

Although these thinkers arrive at their discussions of tradition from diverging philosophical schools and employ various modes of investigation, their conceptualizations of tradition seem to be complementary. They all aim at a rather similar notion of tradition as what can be termed background, textual and constitutive, *contemporary* precondition of both community and self—or, in other words, of reflexive subjectivity. They stress that tradition, which is inherently collective, is not only unavoidable but also vital to the shaping of individual and collective identity. Tradition, in other words, both enables and limits our ability to comprehend reality, stressing our situatedness as a precondition of our very cognition. It is not only unavoidable but also essential for the construction of subjectivity and reflexivity.

Several key themes support this understanding of tradition: Epistemologically, it challenges the empiricist, or positivist, exclusive emphasis on formal reason, or technical knowledge, highlighting instead the essential role of practical reason and traditional knowledge. It also challenges the alleged antinomy between tradition and reason (which originates in Enlightenment notions of reason), highlighting instead tradition as a constitutive element of language, reason, and thought.

These understanding of tradition also stresses that the supposed antinomy between (collective) tradition and (personal) liberty is meaningless, as the very ability to conceptualize the self as an independent agent is itself dependent upon a constitutive tradition in which such a formulation is possible in the first place. In this vein, the above-mentioned thinkers also highlight the positive value of preconceptions and inherited perspectives of socio-historical reality.

This understanding of tradition manages to exposes the blind spots of positivist thought—the intellectual nurturing bed of the modernization/secularization thesis—and offers a way to overcome its limits via an emphasis on alternative modes of knowledge, primarily that of practice.

The system of thought upon which such an understanding of tradition is based is distinguished by its ability to overcome the allegedly exclusive choice between, on the one hand, objectivism, realism, and truth, and, on the other hand, relativism. All of the above-mentioned thinkers offer a careful, nuanced insistence on a view of reality in which there is a single, eternal truth, but at the same time there is an obvious weariness of the empiricist absolutism, stressing instead the limited nature of our ability to grasp this truth, and the historical, communal and changing (i.e. tradition-bound) nature of our knowledge of this truth.

Understanding tradition's constitutive role also sheds light on the nature and role of authority, highlighting it as a precondition of the acquisition of knowledge and of our ability to reflect upon reality. Indeed, this can be seen as yet another critical reflection upon the Enlightenment's suggestion that any precondition to knowledge is inherently wrong and misleading.

The view proposed here is a "textual" conception of tradition, since it understands tradition to become realized and instilled with meaning—like other texts—only when its bearers understand it, that is, interpret it, instill it with meaning (which is always "contemporary"), and practice it. That is to say: the comprehension of tradition (which, in turn, necessitates its interpretation) is a precondition of the very existence of tradition; and this comprehension is embodied, lived, in practice.

As aforementioned, this view stresses that although we do not choose the tradition into which we are born and within which we grow, the ongoing project of the construction and shaping or our identity takes place as part of an ongoing dialog between us, the bearers of tradition, and our tradition. This dialog can bring about an expansion of our horizons, as well as renewed and updated interpretations and understandings of tradition itself (hence, of course, the fact that this practical "language" is never sealed and fixed, and is also in a continuous process of interpretation, reshaping, and updating). In other words, tradition is the basic precondition, inside which (a realm that is continuously shaped and defined) the liberty of its bearers to construct their identity as individuals and as members of a community is constituted:

> Tradition is not the dead hand of the past but rather the hand of the gardener, which nourishes and elicits tendencies of judgment which would otherwise not be strong enough to emerge on their own. In this respect tradition is an encouragement to incipient individuality rather than its enemy. (Shils, 1958, p. 158)

Compare this with the Enlightenment's rationalist conception of individualism, with its emphasis on the individual's sovereignty over tradition.

The concept of "play," or "game," which receives the careful attention of both Gadamer (1989, pp. 102–111) and Wittgenstein (1968, pp. 198–242), illuminates the nature of the interpretive dialog held between tradition and its bearers. To begin with, the actual existence of the game is dependent upon us, the players who choose to take part in it. The fact that the rules of the game are written somewhere or known to someone does not mean that the game actually exists—the rules have to be "enacted," played, interpreted in order for it to exist. But once we "enter" its realm, the rules of the game become the code guiding our behavior; play exists in us, those who practice its rules. We are assigned with roles in this play, become "characters" in its narrative, and the game exists by the very fact that we take part in it and follow its rules. Game, or play, in other words, should not be seen as an independent act by a rational subject (i.e. the actor, the player), but rather as an "activation" of the actor by the play/game. In this sense, the encounter between tradition and its bearers might be described as an "appropriation"—not of tradition by us, but rather vise-versa: we become characters in the play that is tradition. As noted by Ricoeur (1981, pp. 182–198), this implies that we give up on the notion of the subject as a metaphysically independent agent, which is so central to the secularist, rationalist Enlightenment. This renunciation is a precondition for an expansion of our private consciousness under the guidance of the "text" (in this case: tradition).

The tension between alienation/strangeness and belonging is what characterizes the constitutive, dialogical project of understanding tradition, which constructs and appropriates us while we practice or "apply" it. This, it should be repeated, is not a dialog among equals: "we belong to a tradition before it belongs to us: tradition, through its sedimentations, has a power which is constantly determining what we are in the process of becoming" (Bernstein, 1983, pp. 142).

The conditions of our being are such that we are born into and raised inside a tradition—as MacIntyre (1984, p. 221) puts it, we carry a certain past from the moment we are born into it—and

this basic condition is the (unequal) context in which our dialogical relations with tradition are carried out. This dialogical relationship constitutes a continuous attempt at understanding and interpreting tradition, in a process which Gadamer famously calls "a fusion of horizons." This, then, is not a simplistic and unidirectional scheme of tradition's "influence" on us: tradition has a role in our very constitution as individuals and collectives.

This role of tradition takes place through our constant dialog with it, and it is this dialog that also reveals the necessary potentiality at criticizing tradition. As Gadamer (1979, p. 108) notes, we should not be mistaken to think that tradition's constitutive role annuls the possibility of criticizing tradition: "It is a grave misunderstanding to assume that emphasis on the essential factor of tradition which enters into all understanding implies an uncritical acceptance of tradition and sociopolitical conservatism. [...] In truth, the confrontation of our historic tradition is always a critical challenge of this tradition."

In our words, our ongoing "conversation" with tradition means, among other things, that we also criticize tradition, re-evaluate and encourage change in it. Our interpretation of tradition, which is an essential part of our "application"/practice and understanding of it, functions as a fruitful context for a deepened self-awareness and reflexivity on our side. The living, present, and practical interpretation of tradition means not only its release from the yoke of its image as an eternal and frozen message or object from the past, but also the release of our relation to it from the bondage of its image as unidirectional and total obeying (or rebellion).

The emphasis on the dynamic and dialogical character of tradition is probably where the largest gap between "Enlightened" notions (both rationalistic–secularist and conservative) of tradition and the conception of tradition which I seek to reconstruct herein following the above-mentioned thinkers, is opened. But this conception is further complicated if we consider the unique nature of the dialog between tradition and its bearers: Tradition, as that which constitutes the consciousness of its bearers, changes only in a gradual, often relatively slow manner. At the same time, since it exists through the individual's and the communities' practical interpretation, tradition is bound to change over time. This understanding opens up the potentiality for conflict inside tradition, and in a larger historical framework also the option of a comprehensive challenge against it. Similarly, this also clarifies the issue of whether, and how, we might be able to adopt new traditions, which are originally alien to us, as well as the possibility of "translating" traditions, and the nature of the mutual influence, conflict and adaptation between traditions.

IV

Tradition should therefore be seen as an influence, or weighing in, of the past on the present. As a foundation upon which our ability to understand and deal with reality lies, it both enables and limits our horizons, while itself constantly being reinterpreted and updated. This dynamic understanding necessitates not only an abandoning of the secularist, Enlightenment-borne conception of tradition, on its suspicious and negating attitude toward tradition, but also a critical appreciation of the conservative conception of tradition, which tends to sanctify and "freeze" the past and tradition, in effect negating our potential to dialog with tradition.

This understanding is essential for clarifying the traditionist stance. However, as I noted in my opening remarks, here again the terminological ambiguity becomes a pressing issue. For what I am addressing here as traditionism tends to be confused with another stance that, at least nominally, professes loyalty to tradition, namely traditionalism or traditionalization—both of which terms commonly refer to the aforementioned conservative notion of tradition as eternal and unchanging. A discussion of this ambiguity, if not outright confusion, can be helpful in clarifying the traditionist stance, as it can highlight the differences distinguishing these two attitudes toward tradition, traditionism and traditionalism, one from the other.

The conservative or "traditionalist" stance is based on a misunderstanding of the concept of tradition.[6] Conservatism views tradition as sovereign in an absolute manner, set and eternal; it views tradition as the way of nature, a set, finite and unchanging body of rules, values, practices, and norms, whose dictates (which are supposedly unequivocal and perfectly clear) are equal to the laws of nature—eternal and all-encompassing. As such, conservatism "is not an act of conscious affirmation of tradition, but rather a perception of tradition through an imagined conceptual framework, which freezes tradition in a static past, in a way that does not fit with the real nature of tradition" (Sagi, 2006, p. 99). Based on this misconception of tradition, the conservative stance strives at constituting all-encompassing social orders, which are aimed at preserving, sanctifying, and perpetuating tradition, while guaranteeing absolute loyalty, a presumed self-conscious submission of individuals and community to that sealed image of the past. From a conservative point of view, humans are the dutiful, passive creation of tradition, which "determines what is legitimate and what is illegitimate in all realms of life: proper behaviors, perceptions, and aims. It sets the standards for evaluating everything. Tradition is the sole metaphysics, ethics and practice" (Sagi, 2003, pp. 19–20). Conservatism does not leave room for challenging tradition, for a reflexive examination of it, or for introducing it into dialog with competing traditions. This is so since tradition is seen as a manifestation of an eternal, absolute, and confirmed truth. Any challenge to—or undermining of— its tenets amounts to heresy, and any turn toward competing traditions is both irrelevant and forbidden, since by definition, these are false traditions (Shils, 1958, pp. 153–165).

Conservatism, in other words, views tradition as that which *dictates* the outlines of human subjectivity, in a sense subjugating the individual, or the subject, to tradition (or, more accurately, to the image of tradition, as constructed by its authoritative interpreters). Those who "conceive of tradition as an antithesis to the freedom of reason and regard it as something historically given, like nature" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 282) cannot but conclude that the notion of an independent, critical subjectivity is inherently deceiving: "whether one want to be revolutionary and oppose it or preserve it, tradition is still viewed as the abstract opposite of free self-determination, since its validity does not require any reasons but conditions us without our questioning it" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 282).

This insight is critical for distinguishing traditionism from conservatism, since the traditionist stance does not give up on the elements of choice and reflexivity; Moreover, it highlights these elements as preconditions for conducting and maintaining a fruitful dialog between tradition and its bearers. Thus, while the (deceptive) self-image of the conservative, or traditionalist, individual is that of one "who does not relate to tradition in a reflective manner; after all, he does not question tradition, since he does not live outside of it" (Sagi, 2003, p. 16), the traditionist stance is characterized by a high level of self-reflection and criticism that puts tradition, and the nature of one's loyalty to it under constant and continuous scrutiny. Traditionism is a stance and an identity structure of choice, constructed through an ongoing process of reflection. It is the preferred choice of individuals, who view themselves to be free as they choose their identity (even as this choice is inherently limited, and they realize and acknowledge the limited nature of their choice), and as they prefer to practice what they view as loyalty to what they—and their community—acknowledge as the "essential core" of tradition, as the main nurturing bed from which they grow and their identity is defined.

As such, traditionism emerges as a distinctly late-modern stance and identity structure that are built around the idea of "individualization," that is, the shifting of responsibility for construction of identity to the subject:

> To put it in a nutshell, "individualization" consists of transforming human "identity" from a "given" into a "task" and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance. In other words, it consists in the establishment of a *de jure* autonomy (whether or not the de facto autonomy has been established as well).

As this happens, human beings are no more "born into" their identities. As Jean-Paul Sartre famously put it: it is not enough to be born a bourgeois—one must live one's life as a bourgeois. (Note that the same did not need to be, nor could be said about princes, knights, serfs, or townsmen of the pre-modern era; neither could it be said as resolutely about the hereditary rich and hereditary poor of modern times.) Needing to *become* what one *is* is the feature of modern living—and of this living alone. (Bauman, 2000, pp. 31–32; italics in the original)

At the same time, traditionism ties this "task" of identity construction to the concept of tradition, and does not fall into the trap of the premise of an "extreme," atomistic individualism, which views the sovereign individual as preceding any historical, cultural, and social context. The traditionist stance does not forsake the ideal of an independent subject and free choice, but at the same time does not fantasize a context-less individual liberty—one, that is, that lacks a "horizon" of meaning. Moreover, the acknowledgment of tradition as a meaningful horizon is essential for the successful realization of the ideal of authenticity and individual choice:

It may be important that my life be chosen […] but unless some options are more significant than others, the very idea of self-choice falls into triviality and hence incoherence. Self-choice as an ideal makes sense only because some *issues* are more significant than others […] Which issues are significant, *I* do not determine. If I did, no issue would be significant. But then the very ideal of self-choosing as *a moral ideal* would be impossible […]

The agent seeking significance in life, trying to define him- or herself meaningfully, has to exist in a horizon of important questions […] To shut out demands emanating beyond the self is precisely to suppress the conditions of significance […] To the extent that people are seeking a moral ideal here, this self-immuring is self-stultifying; it destroys the condition in which the ideal can be realize. (Taylor, 1992, pp. 39–40; italics in the original)

An emphasis on reflexive subjectivity can distinguish traditionism from conservatism/traditionalism because it is commonly assumed that the latter lacks such reflexivity—or, to be accurate, that such reflexive subjectivity is not part of the conservative image of the "natural" order of things (that is, the order of things prior to the historical challenge against tradition). In a modern context, where such talk of a "natural order of things" of times past is no longer possible, reflexive subjectivity sheds an even more critical light on conservatism, as it exposes those who adhere to a conservative stance as revoking their own right to choose, or as "choosing" not to be reflective, leaving choice and reflexivity to the sole responsibility of tradition's authoritative interpreters (who, in turn, are viewed as seeking to reconstitute tradition's absolute sovereignty).

Critics of conservatism often highlight the deep self-deception embodied in such denial of reflexive subjectivity. Habermas (1994, p. 132), for example, stresses the "irony" emanating from the conservative attempt at instilling our surrounding reality with "ultrastability" through a reconstitution of the past: "The irony lies in the way traditionalism misunderstands itself. In fact, it emerges from the vortex of social modernization, and it apes a substance that has already disintegrated. As a reaction to the overwhelming push for modernization, it is itself a thoroughly modern movement of renewal."

In other words, the tension surrounding the contemporaneous nature of tradition—the tension between the contemporaneity and historicity of our attitude toward the past and its values—illuminates the peculiarity of tradition by highlighting the paradox of the conservative stance: "once it has been spoken, tradition is no longer what its spokesmen claim it to be" (Bauman, 1996, p. 49). Turning to tradition as a source of authority removes it from the realm of the "obvious" and "self-evident" (where it is most powerful and influential, working "silently"), and makes it an object to which the individual or community chooses to turn as a source of authority. Seen as the object of discourse and as a rhetorical instrument used to validate authority, tradition becomes but one of various options, the

predicate of a declared loyalty, and as such, replaceable. The source of authority (when this term is applied to tradition) is not tradition itself but rather loyalty—more precisely the declaration of loyalty—towards it.

The choice of fidelity to tradition is made within the wider context of alternative choices, that is to say: competing loyalties. In this context, conservatism, or "traditionalism," that image of a rigid, uncompromising, allegedly unchanging, adherence to the one, eternal and fixed "Tradition," dissolves naturally. It is revealed to be part of a new motion towards the future and the present (rather than the past, as the conservative/traditionalist terminology would have us believe), deconstructing tradition by turning it into the subject of a discussion on authority. It is, moreover, this ultra-conservative appeal to tradition which highlights the fact that its "self-evident" authority is no longer valid. It is challenged and attacked, a fact stressed by the conservative defensive response: "It is said that human conditions do not exist until they are named; but they are not named until they are noticed, and they are hardly ever noticed until their existence becomes a matter of concern, of active search and creative/defensive efforts" (Bauman, 1996, p. 49).

The very fact that these human conditions—including tradition—attract our attention and become the subject of discussion is what demonstrates their relative weakness as sources of authority. Such discussions testify to the anxiety created around such human conditions, as moves aimed at protecting these conditions and recreating them are brought into being: "To be seen, named, and talked about, tradition must first be challenged by novelty. It is the novelty that conjures up the tradition as its other, as something it is not, something it is up against, or something it lacks and misses [...] Tradition lives only posthumously, in the experience of detraditionalization" (Bauman, 1996, p. 49).

This paradoxical conservative stance further illuminates the unique character of traditionism: The latter's attitude toward tradition acknowledges that tradition is no longer "obvious" and "given"—after all, as a "stranger" inhabiting a field whose outline is determined by the dichotomous binarism of "secularity/rationalism" vs. "conservatism/religiosity," tardlionism is intimately familiar with those competing loyalties, ideologies, and value-systems that mark tradition as their "other." In many cases, traditionism is also positively inclined towards certain central values of these stances (such as "secular" nationalism, for example). At the same time, contrary to the conservative stance, traditionism does not address tradition as an eternal, total and unchanging element, whose authority is absolute and all encompassing, but rather offers a complex stance of basic yet not "fanatical" loyalty to tradition, as the main practice with which to address this reality.

The conservative, "traditionalist" stance also harbors the unavoidable core of a dichotomous, mutually exclusive distinction between then and now, between "traditional man" and "modern man." This, in turn, plays a crucial role in the construction of that narrative of "rupture" between the past and the present, between "modern man" and his history/tradition. These distinctions and narrative are of course also central to the secularist stance, which celebrates that same "rupture," presenting it as an act of liberation from the hold of the past. From a conservative point of view, however, the challenge is to "overcome" the rupture and "return" to the past and tradition, in an act of recovering and reclaiming a long lost path towards this hidden past.

Traditionism, on the other hand, does not constitute itself on a narrative of rupture followed by an incessant attempt at healing the rupture and returning to the past, but rather constructs a narrative of continuity through change, which is inherent to the idea of traditional transmission, interpretation, and correspondence (as opposed to dictation). As one proponent of a traditionist stance notes, while conservatism views tradition as being "reported" or "dictated" from the past to a passive audience in the present, in a one-directional manner, traditionism—and, at that, the very concept of tradition—assigns both sides taking part in the act of transmission with similar (though not necessarily equal) responsibilities: the loyal receiver is assigned with the task of interpreting and applying

the "message" (or custom, practice, etc.) from the past in an ever changing present setting. Reflexive, interpretive subjectivity, in other words, is an essential element of this act of transmission (Buzaglo, 2008, pp. 41–57).

V

A return to the concept of tradition can be helpful in further clarifying the traditionist stance. More specifically, following Smith (1963), we should stress the distinction between the particular, "local" meaning of tradition—according to which, tradition is anything handed over to us from the past, or, more accurately, anything that is perceived to be so—and tradition's collective meaning, that addresses matters of practice and lifestyle. Here, "Tradition is the modus vivendi of a society insofar as it is understood as congruent and continuous with the past" (Graham, 1993, p. 496).

Graham (1993, p. 496), who offers an insightful interpretation of traditionism (although he does not use the term) in a Muslim context, suggests, following Smith, that we identify this collective aspect of tradition as "the 'cumulative tradition' peculiar to any community, large or small [...] In this collective sense, 'tradition' is the sum of a society's specific 'traditions'."

This interpretation of tradition is especially insightful, as it enables a more nuanced understanding of the concepts "traditional society" and "traditionality" (or, for that matter: traditionism) that transcends such dichotomous distinctions as "modern vs. traditional" and "secular/sovereign vs. conservative/subjected." After all, as Graham notes, the term "traditional society" can be applied for describing any society—whether a contemporary/modern or not—whose members perceive their way of life as based in—and continuous to—the past, and value this continuity as positive and virtuous, even when new values explicitly compete for authority in this society. In such societies, even when they experience dramatic changes and transformations, those who adopt a traditionist stance view themselves as obligated to honor (in principle, as a matter of virtue) the past's values, and profess loyalty to symbols, institutions, and practices (in other words: to meaning-generating constructs) which are rooted in the past. As already noted, their historical perception of continuity is especially significant: Traditionists "do not perceive recent history as a major rupture with the past that has decisively broken the authority of that past as normative for, and intimately linked to, the present" (Graham, 1993, p. 497). Traditionism, "a person's or a group's strong preference for recourse to tradition (genuine or invented) as the primary source of authority" (Graham, 1993, p. 498), implies a heightened awareness to the historical authority of practices, norms, and institutions which are essential to— and constitutive of—a certain "cumulative tradition," while stressing the continuity of these practices, norms, and institutions and expressing a *practical* loyalty to them.

This attitude toward the past, the impression or perception of continuity, distinguishes traditionist communities or societies from those that self-identify as "modern" or "secularized." The latter, which are mostly Western, are characterized by that impression or perception of a rupture from the past. In such societies, "a majority, or perhaps only the dominant elites, already have experienced, or see themselves as having experienced, a decisive rupture with the past and thus perceive themselves as no longer 'traditional'" (Graham, 1993, pp. 499–500). These "modern" societies, which tend to identify certain historical events or processes as the points of rupture separating (or liberating) them from the past (such as the Renaissance, the industrial revolution, the French Revolution or the American one) are in effect based on new traditions, or, to borrow Hobsbaum's (1983) term, "invented" traditions. As a result, they tend to view older traditions as obsolete.

This should be reiterated: both "traditional" communities and "modern" ones are constituted by traditions, and assign their traditions an authoritative position. Moreover, understanding the concept of tradition illuminates this as a matter of ontology, not of ideology. The critical distinction between these two types of societies has to do with their self-image; but essentially, they both might adopt traditionism as their guiding stance.

A reiteration of the difference between the traditionist stance and the conservative one is in place here: Contrary to the conservative notion of the "eternal" nature of tradition, traditionism does not understand tradition and the way of life it constitutes to be fixed and unchanging. Moreover, traditionism highlights the fact that the very dynamism and "updating" of tradition—that interpretive dialog with the past—are what rejuvenates tradition, preserve its relevance and, ultimately, reaffirm its authority. This is to say that traditionism is not necessarily aimed at a stubborn and blind preservation or perpetuation of the past, or at resisting the introduction of changes to the community's social, cultural, political or religious life. Just as traditions might function as protectors of the status quo, so can they encourage change and renewal.

As I hinted to at the opening remarks of this essay, the traditionist stance is not a privilege preserved exclusively to those who identify as "traditionist" (or by similar instances of the same idea). Moreover, a central consequence of the interpretation of the concept of tradition suggested here is an expansion of the relevance of this concept to realms that are not usually identified as "traditional," "traditionist" or simply as "loyal" to tradition. This is an expanded notion of tradition, which encourages us to acknowledge tradition's constitutive role in various contexts—including such that are self-perceived as totally sovereign and independent vis-à-vis tradition, or simply indifferent to it, or those that are seen as "orthodox" and "conservative" (hence as willingly subjugated to tradition and absolutely bound by its dictates). Thus, for example, we can and should highlight the role of tradition in the constitution of the scientific practice, and point to the radical inventiveness that characterizes certain "ultra-orthodox" phenomena. My interpretation, in other words, questions the self-images of both sides of the dichotomy that outlines the secularization discourse ("rationalist secularism" vs. "orthodox conservatism," etc.), and expands the relevance of the traditionist stance so as to include these oppositional poles, against which traditionism is further understood.

The conclusion arising from this interpretation is that a dialogical stance in relation to tradition is an essential element of every reflexive subjectivity. But the traditionist stance is distinguished by its explicit, self-aware and critical combination of the principle of loyalty to tradition with the interpretive imperative, which constitutes both the subject's dialogical stance toward tradition and her tentative independence from it. It seems to me that even when rationalists/secularists or conservatives engage in such dialog with tradition they nevertheless often miss one of these two critical elements: The rationalist tends to ignore or deny the fact that tradition is relevant (even when her actions manifest a dialog with tradition), while the conservative tends to deny the fact that her daily practice demands a reflexive interpretation of tradition.

Two short comments might be useful in illuminating this argument. First, I have already mentioned that even by the conservative self-image—even though conservatives tend to view themselves as passive subjects of tradition—there is a special role reserved for those who are identified as the authoritative interpreters of tradition for its practical interpretation and application. These interpreters cannot deny the fact that they engage in an interpretive act that necessitates the presence and action of a reflexive, independent and individual "agency," even when they present their act as a passive transmission of the past's dictates. After all, if the meaning of tradition was apparent and understood without mediation and without interpretation, why would we need the social institutions of such interpretive authority in the first place? Nevertheless, conservatism has become an overarching ideology, of which a certain expression of such denial is a constitutive element.

Second, we must note that a rebellion against tradition is also an expression of a dialogical relation to it. Think, for example, of the scientist who chooses to challenge the accepted practices/truths of her field; or, for that matter, of the first generation of the "secularizing" folks, who choose not to observe the religious practices upon which they were raised: Both cases manifest an act of rebellion against a dominant tradition that emanates from an intimate familiarity with this tradition (and, following it, also the adoption of competing traditions, or the initial constitution of an alternative tradition). But the burning question in this regard is how informed are those who grow upon such new or alternative traditions (the rebellious scientist's students; the second-generation secularists)

of the "original" tradition, the rebellion against which has been the act that constitutes their own identity. Often, they tend to be ignorant of these "old" traditions (they view them as manifestly irrelevant), and are not aware of the fact that their practice is constituted upon such an act of rebellion against those "old" traditions.

Both of these cases manifest a misunderstanding of the concept of tradition. They deny its constitutive, essential role and the dialogical nature of our relation to tradition. In this sense, the traditionist stance is further distinguished by embodying, even if only in a practical, not ideological manner, a better understanding of the concept of tradition.

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Notes
1. Most works that belong to what is usually termed today "post-secularism" tend to make similar assessments (for a few penetrating examples see, Asad, 2003; Bhargava, 2005; Casanova, 1994, 2006; Connolly, 1999; Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2008; Taylor, 2007). Needless to say, this does not pretend to be an exhaustive list.
2. In the Jewish–Israeli context, the State's (failing) attempts at enforcing national homogeneity through the educational system are quite an explicit example of this (see Buzaglo, 2001, 2002).
3. For recent explorations of the meaning of Jewish–Israeli *masurtiyut,* see Buzaglo (2008) and Yadgar (2011b). For an earlier discussion on the phenomenon, see Deshen and Shokeid (1984).
4. See, for example, Katz (1984) usage of the terms "traditional society" (*hevra masortit*) to mark pre-modern Jewish societies.
5. For an extended discussion of this point, see Yadgar (2011b).
6. See, for example, Gadamer's (1989, p. 319) criticism of romanticist traditionalism and MacIntyre's (1984, pp. 221–222) criticism of Edmund Burke's notion of conservatism. For a contention against MacIntyre's reading of Burke, see Byrne (2011, pp. 91–93) and Baldacchino (1983).

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