

Chapter 2

Postmodernity and Tradition

Chapter Introduction

As the thesis concerns the role and place of pagan movements within a postmodern sociological context in relation to tradition, the purpose of this chapter is to present the different competing tendencies of postmodernity. It also presents the theories developed around the concept of tradition.

A. Postmodernity

1. The main features of postmodernity

Postmodernity forms a complex corpus of often contradictory ideas, but the following is an attempt to present a reading of it, then to select a definition for the purposes of this study, definition indicated in the chapter conclusion. Postmodernism encompasses all realms of culture, from literature to architecture, including philosophy and the social sciences. The architect Charles Jenks (1977) purportedly borrowed it from Joseph Hudnut, who, in 1945, penned an article entitled "The Postmodern House." Others (e.g., Docherty, 1993), on the contrary, credit Arnold Toynbee with the first use of the term, in his *Study of History* (1939), in which he places the end of modernity between 1850 and 1875. Postmodernity, as a term, is in itself ambiguous, in the sense that it both conveys the concept of an aspiration towards the future, an ideal of progress, and denotes an historical period. There are postmodern authors and postmodern methodologies, in particular in the social sciences. Postmodern time, meaning the period after modern time, is also referred to as "reflexive modernity". As Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994:5) argued. "This concept does not imply (as the adjective "reflexive" might suggest) *reflection*, but (first) *self-confrontation*. The transition from the industrial to the risk period of modernity occurs undesired, unseen and compulsively in the wake of the autonomised dynamism of modernisation, following

the pattern of latent side effects... Let us call the autonomous, undesired and unseen, transition from industrial to risk society *reflexivity*".

Bauman uses the term "liquid modernity," which he defines in terms of three stages he calls "light", "solid" and "fluid" in the struggle for power (Bauman, 2000: 120): "Light" modernity lets one partner out of the cage; "Solid" modernity was an era of mutual engagement; and "Fluid" modernity is the period of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase. Gidden's "radical modernity" (Pearson 1998: 97) corresponds to the more recent period of modernity, with "the increasing erosion of tradition and nature. The radicalisation of modernity means being forced to live in a more reflexive way, facing a more open and problematic future."

Alain Touraine (1992: 347) calls on the term "low modernity", which he borrowed from Marshall Berman, and which means "an extreme modernism," generalised and omnipresent according to a process similar to the transformation of power described by Foucault, concentrated first at the top, then subsequently diffusing throughout the social body and in daily life. Rosenau (1992: 14) makes a distinction between sceptical and affirmative postmodernity. The first is a negative view of the modern world, one which is equivalent to chaos, death and future. In its most extreme form, it is an incitement to suicide, as there is no apparent solution. In fact, the consequence of modernity is that postmodernity is an age of uncertainty where nothing is sure, there is nothing to hang on to. Affirmative postmodernity criticises modernity as well, but it does not stop at acknowledging the facts. It is open to positive factors as well, which means a new set of values or actions. Death is not the ultimate consequence: after modernity, there is still life. French authors such as Gilles Lipovetsky, "the desperate," and Michel Maffesoli, "the joyful," exemplify this distinction. This is important, as it will help to clarify the themes developed in the succeeding discussion.

2. Uncertainty, insecurity and fragmentation versus freedom and well-being

According to some authors, in the wake of modernity, with the supremacy of reason, ours are times of uncertainty. Because no truth has really stood the test of time, no ideology remains valid. All the elements that defined, and formed the core of, Western thought have lost meaning: reason no longer reigns supreme, self has become indeterminate, God or nation have ceased to form the axis and framework of peoples' lives. For Zygmunt Bauman (1992: xxiv), this situation results from the proclamation of a kind of absolute freedom, which "legalises" ethical uncertainty. Lash (1999: 3) states the same thing in asserting that "Contemporary risk societies are thus societies in which ever more individuals are forced into situations of rule-finding reflexive judgement. They are societies in which the impossibilities of subsumption of the particular by the pre-given universal is taken as given." According to Giddens (1991), this reflexivity is the consequence of a separation between time and space. Place is to be considered within a global context: de-contextualised, it has ceased to constitute a reference per se. Individual identity is forced to be a construction without reference to the security which was provided by the coherence of time and space. A global world leads to the loss of established references.

Fragmentation affects all spheres of society without any coherence, since the human world is viewed "as irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority, with no horizontal or vertical order, either in actuality or in potency" (Bauman 1992, 35). There is no norm to refer to anymore, as people choose their way of life freely (Lipovetsky, 2004: 31). For Giddens (1991: 2), the principle of radical doubt is institutionalised, and knowledge is in fact subject to the opinion of experts, who represent a multiple source of authority.

Because limits have exploded everywhere, new ones are created according to the ability or the impossibility to access information: people are classified into those who access information and those who do not (Lash, 1999: 344). This situation also leads to a "resurgence of violence as a

main instrument of construction of order and the search for truths able to fill the gap left by the end of real debates within society” (Bauman, 2003: 175). But we can wonder whether violence is not a human characteristic which, although it may have become more visible in our societies since the end of the Second World War, has always existed.

According to Giddens (1991), the fragmentation of society and fragmentation of individuals go hand in hand; the image of personality is no longer that of the unified self and it is the era of the multiple self. But here one can wonder whether such developments are a consequence of modernity, a consequence of our disoriented society, or whether it is a realisation that has been made possible by modernity, meaning that nowadays we have become aware that an individual, rather than having a single personality, can manifest several personalities. Michel Maffesoli (1991b) develops the concept of multiple identity in the sense that people can belong to several groups according to their preferences, tastes and affective affinities. They can identify with multiple cultures present in our society and have multiple affinities.

As Bauman (2003: 182) argued, this fragmentation actually occurs under globalisation, where people have access to the same culture, a shapeless or uniform one where everyone can feed in a MacDonald's and watch the latest “docu-dramas” devised for television. In 1988, Jean-François Lyotard (1988: 27) remarked that even artists did not comply with canons anymore, that their work was no longer evaluated according to fixed rules, but rather that their guidelines were derived rationally out of the works themselves. This would suggest that there is no cohesion anywhere, no common project or source of creativity.

Ritzer (2004) has coined the term of the “MacDonaldisation” of society referring to efficiency in getting from one point to another, a world where quantity is synonymous with quality, reflecting the adage “Big is beautiful.” It also means predictability, i.e., “the assurance that products and

services will be the same over time and in all locales” (Ritzer, 2004:14). MacDonaldisation indicates that society is “massified” in the sense that people are considered as a mass and not as individuals or peoples. This goes together with the reification of humanity. Everything is consumable in a world without surprises, in which life goes faster and faster, whatever the field, from food to services. Ritzer’s MacDonaldisation infiltrates every sphere of society. It occurs in the control of conception, for instance: “the problem of male impotence has been attacked by the burgeoning impotence clinics, some of which have already expanded into chains, and an increasingly wide array of technologies, including medicine (especially Viagra) and mechanical devices.” (Ritzer, 2004: 124). Here, as elsewhere, whatever the subject or the sector, problems are addressed as technological ones, with large corporations or firms providing a range of solutions.

First there is a search for remedies based on an awareness of suffering and the offer of and demand for healing. As Giddens remarks, “therapy offers someone to turn to, a secular version of the confessional” (1991: 33). Many kinds of therapy currently and visibly flourish in the Western world, ranging from alternative to more conventional ones. It seems that more and more people engage with the therapeutic process, sometimes combining several forms of therapy at one time. But the confusion between “confession” and “therapy” sounds abusive in the sense that a confession serves to take a great weight off one’s shoulders, whereas a therapeutic process, if conducted honestly and properly, confers an understanding of the mechanisms behind pain and a release from them.

Ronald Inglehart (1997: 75) asserts that formerly the core of the process of modernisation was economic whereas now it is involved with individual well-being: “The core project of modernisation is economic growth, and the means to attain it through industrialisation – the systematic application of technology to maximise the output of tangible things, such as wheat, textiles, coal, steel, and tractors. In Postmodernisation, the core project is to maximise individual

well-being, which is increasingly dependent on subjective factors. Human behaviour shifts from being dominated by the economic imperatives of providing food, clothing, and shelter toward the pursuit of quality of life concern.” There has been a shift from economic basics to self-oriented comforts.

There is also now a post-materialist concern with ecology, as modern societies become aware of consequences their actions have upon nature and the world itself. Inglehart, unlike Zygmunt Bauman, asserts that a sense of security does indeed prevail at present in western societies, and that this sense of material security frees people from fixed, established systems of values. Postmodernity is accordingly understood to revolve around the key concept of well-being. The new cleavage is one between fundamentalist values and postmodern ones. Postmodern values include concern for well-being, tolerance, freedom, and the meaning and purpose of life. By contrast, the fundamentalist values are those that are founded on authority or authoritative principles: the authority of religion, politics, and old systems of values.

So it appears that Western society is in quest of unification and well-being but with new references and axes. The healing might help people to re-unificate themselves and to find another sense of integrity associated with a limited freedom, limited in the sense of being respectful toward other and the environment.

3. A loss of sacredness that goes hand in hand with ephemerality, pastiche, a disenchanted world versus a return of Romanticism

N. J. Demerath (2000) argues that the debate in the sociology of religions should revolve around the question of the sacred. She distinguishes four types, or *cells*, characterising the variety of sacred.

1. The sacred as *integrative*: it can be exemplified by religious or non-religious manifestations: conversions, confessions, communion or falling in love, encounters with nature, or “epiphanal responses to sacred symbols such as flag or song” (2000: 5).
2. The sacred as *quest*: compensatory marginality corresponds to the quest, as it attempts to seek new meanings and experiences “for those who feel the old inadequate” (2000:5). In its religious form, ecumenical movements which aim at policy changes exemplify this type of quest and in the non-religious form it is exemplified by “new spiritual pursuits” embodied in New Age.
3. The sacred as *collectivity* in the form of any version of religious collectivity or “civil religion,” together with ideologies such as communism.
4. The sacred as *counterculture* exemplified by rightwing tendencies including the Ku Klux Klan, Skinheads and Survivalists, and by leftwing ones including anti-nuclear activism, environmental conservation and the gay and lesbian cause.

Demerath gives a definition of sacred understood as actions or category, even when she speaks of it as a personal experience. After asking, “How should we define the sacred?”; “Would we know a sacred consequence objectively without experiencing it personally?” and “Can we really study the sacred once we have experienced it personally because of the biases this introduces?” Demerath (2000: 8)-replies that it is necessary to contextualise the sacred by admitting variables: when it is characterised in terms of its subjective functions rather than its objective substance and which sorts of sacred are experienced under what conditions and by whom. It is necessary to compare “the incomparable” (Demerath, 2000: 9), meaning for instance, political movements and healing groups, in their structure and culture.

Roger Caillois (1957, quoted in Ries, 1981: 29) gives a more refined and less confused definition of it; he describes it as “the fundamental category of religious sensitivity, the one which gives its specific characteristic.” Ries (1981: 30), analysing Caillois theory and writing, argues that for

him, the “sacred presents itself as a stable or transitory characteristic affecting beings, spaces, times, things, which covers those beings or things it takes possession. This sacral quality does not belong to the beings or things. It is mysteriously added to the real”. He says that it is more than a category but a mysterious quality, ungraspable in fact in the ordinary world. This ungraspable and mysterious characteristic is best described by Marcel Gauchet (2005: 297): “The sacred is specifically the presence of absence, we might say, the tangible and sensible manifestation of what is hidden to the senses and of what human being can not grasp”. But apart with mystery and “ungraspability”, the sacred viewed as a neutral element by itself and independent from the ethical considerations, termed “numinous” (Otto, 2001: 27) is also associated with the quality of *majestas*, i.e., “the absolute superiority of mightiness” (Otto, 2001: 46) and of fascination, i.e., “something which seduces, carries away, strangely delights, grows in intensity until producing drunkenness” (Otto, 2001: 70). All those qualities have been lost. Baudrillard (1981: 24) cites such figures as Marilyn Monroe or James Dean, whose mythical aura made their deaths real. In contrast, our present age is one of simulation. Rather than reinvented simulation, all is lived on one grand plane of equality, with no sense of grandeur and no will to better oneself. There are no longer any true celebrities, because today’s theatrical and sports idols have lost their aura of mystery: they are merely humans like everybody else. Even if they have been held as sacred, now there are no more individuals capable of being sacred or incarnating such an idea.

Desacralisation and disenchantment go together. The first sociologist who viewed the world as disenchanted was Max Weber, who wrote (1947: 139):

The increasing intellectualization and rationalisation do *not*, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives. It means something else, namely, the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one could learn it any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers

existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means.

The world has lost both the ungraspable quality which affects some beings, gives them mystery and meaning, and its magic. Bauman places the fault on modernity with its stated mission to free the world from magic and mystery. Rather than reason being the instrument to liberate man, it has instead resulted in depriving world of soul. Man has become one instrument, and nature another (Bauman, 1991: 4). This is the reign of chaos, in which people demand rights but accept no responsibility for them. The net result is the dissolution and the dismantling of institutions which, during the modern era, were expected to elevate human beings into a state of perfection. According to Bauman (2003: 287), surrendering ideals is now the ultimate act of liberation.

The disenchanted world has reached a point of artificiality and loss of authenticity which are best represented by theme parks. Thus, Jean Baudrillard (1981: 24) cites Disneyland as a “perfect model of all the simulacra entangled.” He sees this example as a game of illusions and phantasms, with pirates, the frontier, the Future World, etc. He notes further that there is an astonishing contrast between the park itself and the parking lot, which looks like a “concentration camp.” In fact, Baudrillard points out the contrast between an illusory world and cold and lifeless reality. “Disneyland” is posed as imagination, to make believe that the rest is real. It is no longer a matter of false representation of reality (ideology), but of hiding the fact that reality itself is no longer real, in order to preserve the principle of reality” (1981: 26). The author means that superficiality has already replaced everything real, so it is necessary to give the illusion that there is still reality somewhere. Bryman (1995: 178) goes further in describing such places as “providing playgrounds for the emergent post-tourist and to that extent exhibiting a further aspect of postmodern taste. Through their cultivation of excitement, their presentation of soundbites of history (and the future), and their fabrication of simulacra which are better than their original referents and exhibit impossible juxtapositions...” Whereas “Through tourism, people embark

on a quest for authenticity, to seek meaning in foreign places in their natural, unadulterated state.”

(Bryman, 1995: 175)

The current contention of postmodern authors is that Western societies have lost a sense of sacred because the prevailing condition is ephemeral, in which pastiche prevails. According Bryman (1995: 162), pastiche is a juxtaposition of references, in which “Discordant images are placed together to generate webs of mutually reinforcing coherence and incoherence...One particular manifestation of this fondness for pastiche is what Harvey (1989) refers to as ‘time-space compression’ in which one is faced by collages of symbols of time and place”. The postmodern losses are deep. Baudrillard (1981: 27) adds that faculties have been lost:

Everywhere, lost faculties, or the lost body, or the lost social instinct, or the lost taste of food are recycled. Penury is reinvented, ascetics, wild nature, that has disappeared. Marshall Sahlins’ idea is verified, but on a secondary level, for his idea is that it is the market economy, and not nature, which gives rise to penury: here, in the sophisticated last phase of a triumphant market economy, penury/sign, penury/simulacrum, is reinvented: a simulated behaviour of under-development (included in the adoption of Marxist theory), which under the banner of ecology, energy crisis, and criticism of capital, adds an esoteric aureole to the triumph of an esoteric culture.

Bauman adds that identities themselves (2000: 89) have been lost: “The world constructed of durable objects has been replaced with disposable products designated for immediate obsolescence. In such a world, identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume.”

But, if identities have been lost, according to Jean-François Lyotard (1979: 30), the aim of life is now up to each individual’s own private judgment. The great narratives have broken down (Lyotard, 1979:31). Knowledge is no longer legitimised by great narratives: “small narratives” have replaced them in the public imagination. This means, for example, that the legitimisation process by which the legislator promulgates law is no longer founded upon all-encompassing narratives, that is, on socially foundational philosophies. The situation might be equated with the

loss of a sense of grandeur, with a loss of great dreams in exchange for the present, but not a present to which something stronger than itself is inherent. Along the same lines of thinking, Lyotard deplores the manner in which universities only confer skills, and have stopped being “life models” (1979: 79). There is no more *fundamentum absolutum et inconcussum*, according to Gianni Vattimo’s expression (1990:59). For Vattimo (1991: 19), this marks the end of history: “in my hypothesis, modernity ends when, for several reasons, it is impossible to speak of history as an unitary phenomenon. Such a vision of history implies the existence of a centre around which events gather and organise themselves”. Bauman (1991: 89) claims: “In short, to cut the present off at both ends, to sever the present from history. To abolish time in any other form but of a loose assembly, or an arbitrary sequence, of present moments; to flatten the flow of time into a *continuous present*.” Time became a continuous present in an ephemeral manner accompanied by a superficiality which is to be found in the behaviours themselves even toward past great causes. For example, in social or political movements, there used to be strong commitment (Giddens, 1990: 157). People’s participation corresponded to values that they sought to defend. There were also leaders able to inspire others to great causes. Maybe this is one reason for the end of history. Baudrillard also sees this ephemerality when he speaks of the death of politics (1981: 44).

Even if, initially, most postmodern theorists were French (philosophers like Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard), the concept of postmodernism itself was, in fact, inspired by Heidegger and Nietzsche. Its inspiration came from Germany. In a sense, we might well ask whether Romanticism is not the actual inspiration behind it - Romanticism in opposition to Enlightenment and its values. Gianni Vattimo, assuming that disenchantment, and hence the loss of myth, is a real historical phenomenon, identifies a return of myth in contemporary Western societies (1990: 59). European culture appears to hesitate between overcoming and preserving its religious past. It is a contradictory characteristic, which might help to explain why nostalgia often seems to

accompany progress. Classicism and Romanticism exemplify this conflict. We can detect a growing sentiment, that our societies and cultures are awaiting a return of myth as a repository for a primordial understanding that might enable the opposition between rationalism and irrationalism to be overcome. According to Vattimo (1990:61),

The postmodern individual, if he seeks within himself a prime truth, does not find the safety of the Cartesian *cogito* but... narratives of the media, mythologies brought out of hiding by psychoanalysis. The return of myth in our culture and our language strives to achieve this modern or indeed postmodern experience. But it is not the rebirth of a knowledge uncorrupted by modernity and rationalisation that is at issue. It only signifies that the 'return of myth,' if it is as real as it would appear to be, probably tends towards an overcoming of the opposition between rationalism and irrationalism.

4. Individualism, Neo-tribes, and Community

Christopher Lash (2000: 24) has developed the concept of "narcissistic culture," in which, he claims, we live today, meaning "the culture of competitive individualism" which is nevertheless dying. In brief, the narcissistic individual seeks immediate gratification, is perpetually unsatisfied, and his private and public life are intertwined. This mixing of what was formerly held distinct has profoundly altered social relationships, for people do not respect the kind of distances, which were considered proper elements of courtesy in the past. Intimacy is publicly bared and no longer affords of any guarantee of protection. There is no construction of permanence, in love or friendship. According to Lash, our society either devalues what he calls the "small comforts" or pursues them indulgently. A standard criticism made today is that we expect too much of life and not enough of ourselves, as we hold on to phantasms of creative and meaningful work. Lash speaks of "theatricalism in politics"; people do not rule, they play a game. It means that the ruler has merged with his function: he has appropriated it and identifies himself with it, confusing the function with his own ego. He does not serve anything but himself. Baudrillard (1981: 49) demonstrates this point by citing the example of current heads of state who are unlike primitive kings, who were themselves motivated by an acute awareness of the monarch's official and

possibly pending sacrificial death. Modern political imagery is moving increasingly in the direction of delaying death, of keeping it hidden it as long as possible. In Lash's opinion, this has become an obsession, which has developed since the revolutionary era, and charismatic leaders like Hitler, Franco, and Mao no longer have a legal heir, nor dynastic power. They are obliged to survive indefinitely: popular myth is never willing to accept those leaders are dead. Thus they perpetuate their memory and the myths surrounding them. In citing the example of pharaohs who incarnated a unique person, he demonstrates the loss of the meaning of function in our world for the benefit of an individual. This typical narcissistic feature accompanies the loss of sacredness, as values, or their incarnation, are not what predominates, but the individual himself. The figure has replaced the principle.

This critique looks to traditionalist authors such as René Guénon or the right wing occultist Julius Evola. The fact is important with respect to the topics of this study, as these authors have a non-negligible influence upon some pagan movements, some with extreme-right tendencies, some not. Guénon (1973) identifies individualism as one of the characteristics of the modern world. It is equivalent to rejecting the existence of any principle superior to individuality, thereby reducing civilisation to human elements alone. According to Guénon, individualism is the cause of the decline of the Western World. It involves the negation of "intellectual intuition," and the result of this negation is that reason has become the most important faculty. Furthermore, in our world, nothing and no one are in his/her place. Individuals do not recognise any efficient authority in the spiritual order, nor any legitimate power in the temporal order. The inferior passes judgment on the superior, humanity substitutes itself for the divine. The individual claims to dictate his law derived from his/her own relative and fallible reasoning. Community is merely the sum of the individuals composing it and cannot be opposed to them. The same is true of the State, which only represents the mass, but does not reflect any superior principle.

Of course, inherent to this is a critique of democracy which is not present in postmodernity theory: never do these authors challenge the principle of democracy. Julius Evola (1991) evokes the principle of past civilisations based on sacred royalty, peace and justice, state and empire, rite, contemplation and action. Modern man, he argues, is the complete opposite, subject to collective “demonisation” and to new forms of barbarity. The traditional world recognised a “supra-world,” beyond our world, and life meant nothing if unconnected with it (Evola, 1991:40). Evola defines a superior principle of being which underlay authority and institutions. Within the temporal order, some human beings incarnated the presence of a force emanating from above. *Pontifex* was literally the “maker of bridges or ways,” because *pons* meant a “way” between the natural and the supernatural. The foundations of authority were metaphysical; an individual was invested with authority because he embodied a superior principle. And rite was the element allowing the community to partake of the leader’s innate transcendence (Evola, 1991: 69). Civilisations do not collapse, he continued, because of decadence and lack of morality: these are merely a sign, not the true cause, which is the fact that Virtue and the Way are ignored. Evola explains that morality is not a superior principle, it is a human element, whereas Virtue and the Way constitute an axis which elevates. True civilisation is grounded in a divine phenomenon. When this degenerates, then the civilisation collapses. It is the loss of sacredness that brings on ruin. Evola describes the process by which our civilisation passed from the Golden Age into the Iron Age. He mentions Christianity in particular, which incarnates not a religion of Law, but a substitute for Mystery, corresponding to a broken type of human being. According to Evola, this myth is nothing but a more recent version of the Dionysian theme of the sacrificed god.

The loss of ontology itself might be the real problem (Lash, 1999). Subjects exist only in relationship with objects. In the universal project, and with humanism, the subject retained an infinite dimension – he was the representative of a higher dimension, and held onto a sacred dimension, as a “sacred human.” Nowadays, the subject is a “body in the world” (Lash,

1999:342) and has finally lost all mystery, because the “non-rationality of primary processes in the unconscious mind” is recognised. One could question Lash here by asking whether, if the primary non-rationality is indeed recognised, would this not be in itself a re-recognition of the sacred dimension? Perhaps what we are seeing is the beginning of a Weberian re-enchantment of the world? According to Lash, a being becomes only an “actant,” on the same level as objects and symbols, when he is a point, a terminal or a mediating entity within a network. Jean François Lyotard confirms this tendency in the *Post Modern Condition* (1979: 70): people, he argues, have become only transmitters and receivers of information. There is not only a dehumanisation process, as people are entangled in a technological network, but also reification: the reification of the human being and that of society. People are, accordingly, victims of technologies, as no one seems capable of understanding and controlling them. “Reality is perceived as an unstable environment of trembling images” (Lash, 2000: 307). This may be perceived as the absolute evil: “the power reducing subjects to nothing more than a human resource, serving to produce wealth, power or information” (Touraine, 1992: 294).

In an earlier article entitled “New Age and Neo paganism in Russia” (Ferlat 2003), it was argued that a reification is not new, but actually has a long history behind it, particularly in Western societies. It was observed that Western societies probably consist of nothing but victims because of the past reification of human beings through such systems as capitalism and communism. And nowadays, people might seek their own truth, not in an individualistic sense, but in the sense of self-realisation, the revelation of their innermost selves, having divine implications.

Zygmunt Bauman states that community is now presented as the solution to fill the gap left by the dissolution of past institutions in helping people to support individual identities (2003: 371). Since the Enlightenment, the condition for emancipation and freedom of an individual was the breaking of community ties in order to free him from his conditions at birth. It is a return to the

starting point. Bauman is probably thinking of such authors as Giddens, who assert that “modernity breaks down the protective framework of the small community of tradition, replacing these with much larger, impersonal organisations” (1991: 32-33). Bauman devoted a book to the subject of community (2001) with a negative perspective, declaring that we miss community because we miss security; the principle of community is based on security. In the context of Western societies, at the outset everyone should be given his/her chance and autonomy, which is not the case. In fact, today’s conception is a culturalist version of human rights, but “the task of the human rights to ensure well-being and a life lived in dignity” remains unfulfilled (Bauman, 2001: 88).

There is a cultural pluralism which, in Alain Touraine’s words (1997), is confused with multi-communitarianism. The first demands the right for individuals to select their modes of life, whereas, in the second, the individual is overwhelmed “by the fact of community belonging ... and so better left out of negotiation” (Bauman, 2001:108). This in fact allows inequality and a lack of recognition and gives free rein to globalisation. It is actually the down side of this apparent freedom. At the lowest level of the system, lies the ghetto, which means the impossibility of community because it corresponds to a policy of exclusion. In fact, ghettos are always places peopled by victims, whether they have chosen to be there or not (Bauman, 2001:123). There is a security problem which transforms multi-culturalism into multi-communitarianism, because people feel threatened by their own identity (Bauman, 2001: 141). A community can only work if people care about sharing and mutual support (Bauman, 2001: 150).

If our world is indeed one that is fragmented and where social structure is no longer based on conventions, authors such as Michel Maffesoli (1991b; 2003) view it in a positive light, in the sense that it means that new identities allow new tribes to form. People have multiple identifications and are situated within a series of “affective participations” (2003: 118).

According to him, there are two opposing forms of power (1991b): the power of the underground social entity, which is clearly in opposition to the power emanating from above. These two forms of power do not represent a history, they live just the present. Fifteen years later (2004: 53), Maffesoli asserts that we are at the heart of the true societal question: the question of the hunger for life, of the return of immanence and enjoyment. The author does not mention narcissism; he focuses on the celebration of life. Rootedness is also at issue: "place makes tie" was the subtitle of a book he published in 2003. There is a close relationship in some eras between belonging to a land, a part of nature, and belonging to a group. The author again remarks that *territory* has an "affective" connotation because it stresses reliance (Maffesoli, 2004: 69-70). This rootedness creates small local narratives, local in the sense of an actual or virtual piece of land, where tribes are created according to sexual, religious or musical preferences (Maffesoli, 2004: 71-72). Each group has a shared language and has in common conventional thoughts with a sacramental function (Maffesoli, 2004:85).

In addition to the ideas developed by Michel Maffesoli, there is another trend to which Nicanor Perlas devoted a book (2003): the emergence of civil society. The author, a Philippino, founded a study and research centre for durable development. He administers a local bank for the poor and introduced biodynamic agriculture into the Philippines. According to him, there is now a transfer of power for the benefit of civil society. For example, civil society neutralises governments' dangerous initiatives (Perlas, 2003: 119): it succeeded in preventing the ratification of a treaty which would have been "more powerful and more inequitable than the Agreement instituting the World Trade Organisation." This treaty would have granted transnational firms access to a country's resources with minimum responsibilities toward the country concerned. Civil society's opposition reduces worldwide sales of such transnational firms as Monsanto, which allegedly used dishonest dealings to disseminate its transgenic products. Civil society is composed of

organisations that offer humanitarian aid, for example. Thus this, too, challenges theories on individualism and a lack of commitment to ideals or of responsibility.

Every society arguably has a shadow side, and Michel Maffesoli points this out, asserting that our societies still contain a Dionysiac aspect that formerly was recognised (1991a) and accepted. Nowadays, although we have suppressed it in a formal sense, it re-emerges in other forms. He recalls the festivals of the past in honour of Dionysus, God of Love and Death. Such celebrations afforded the opportunity to give free rein to vital impulses and a kind of lewdness inherent to humanity that was both recognised and permitted. It is contrary to morality and goes hand in hand with a sense of tragedy. There is a fraction of violence that is exteriorised and is necessary to the idea of social harmony. Maffesoli quotes the paroxysmal history of Pentheus, king of Thebes, murdered by his mother. This murder brings new life to the City (Maffesoli, 1991a: 155). This is not an apology for violence, but it is nevertheless impossible to pretend it does not exist. Shadow being an integral part of society, the latter must come to terms with it. Integrating it allows it to be expressed and thereby mastered. There is a more or less obvious orgiastic confusion residing in “everyday ordinariness” (Maffesoli, 1991a: 237).

From Maffesoli's argument, it might be said that despite negative aspects, our times are in fact, above all, a period of awareness. It does not mean that an immediate solution will follow as a matter of course. And both shadow and difference are recognised as elements that go into an individual's, or a society's, composition. Indeed, it is complexity that is permitted. People and societies have ceased to reflect a single definition or norm. If they seek simplification in some respects, an awareness of people's complexity nevertheless remains: we know we are multi-layered.

It is difficult to differentiate between postmodernity as a criticism of modernity, and postmodernity as a new era. According to Giddens (1990), postmodernity is a condition yet to be achieved. Sometimes, postmodernity has to be defined (Bauman, 1991: 52):

I suggest, in other words, that the phenomena described collectively as 'postmodernity' are not symptoms of systemic deficiency or disease; neither are they a temporary aberration with a life-span limited by the time required to rebuild the structures of cultural authority. I suggest instead that postmodernity (or whatever other name will be eventually chosen to take hold of the phenomena it denotes) is an aspect of a fully-fledged, viable social system which has come to replace the 'classical' modern, capitalist society and thus needs to be theorised according to its own logic.

The author speaks of re-enchanting the world: "All in all, postmodernity can be seen as restoring to the world what modernity, presumptuously, had taken away; as a *re-enchantment* of the world that modernity tried hard to *dis-enchant*" (Bauman, 1991: 3).

According to Marc Luycks (2001: 49-50), on the other hand, we live in a transmodern society whose features are not obvious yet, but will become so afterwards. The main characteristic of transmodernity is the absence of the notion of superiority. Religions are equal, cultures are equal, men and women, too: Luycks identifies the following characteristics of transmodernity:

1. Transmodernity is democratic. People sit around a table and discuss common problems together. The preoccupation with common problems represents an ethical, qualitative bond, as particular concerns are no longer central.
2. Transmodernity is post-patriarchal. Women once again become indispensable to invent new solutions.
3. Transmodernity is tolerant: its definition of truth includes all the cultures and all the citizens in the world. It redefines a new link between religion and politics. There is no confusion between them as in old times, nor separation, as in modernity. A new distinction is to be found.

4. It underlines the notion of transformation, aiming at making our personal and social life an harmonious whole. The spiritual dimension has ceased to be a taboo, so a re-enchanted world is possible because soul has been freed. People can have access to it.

5. It suppresses and dissolves the very notion of clergy, technocrat and specialist. The notion of an intermediary between man and God, between man and science, is viewed as less and less necessary and acceptable. Transmodernity fundamentally redefines the relationship between science, ethics and society. Science is deeply transformed, since it decompartmentalises its subject matter and views itself as transdisciplinary.

6. And last but not least, transmodernity rediscovers the sacred dimension of life, time and space, in a system which is not vertical and authoritarian. It might be objected that of course this is an ethical desideratum as our societies show many counter examples. Transmodernity might be seen as one of one a sociological trend and a potential.

B. Tradition

Edward Shils (1981) defined the main characteristics of tradition. Tradition embodies the notion of transmission and influence from the past. It is a “temporal chain” and forms “a sequence of variations on received and transmitted themes” (Shils, 1981: 13). Its value depends on its recipients and how it is perceived. It is living indeed and constitutes a guiding pattern. It is sustained by orality and past objects and participates in the formation of identity.

There are also invented traditions (Hobsbawm, 1993), which claim a spurious historicity. Neo-traditionalism (Sharot, 1992) is more a representation of past traditions than authentic ones. It means that people can project their view of tradition according to specific aims or their personal imaginary. “The ‘integrity’ of tradition derives not from the simple fact of persistence over time but from the continuous ‘work’ of interpretation that is carried out to identify the strands which bind present to past,” asserts Giddens (Beck, Giddens, Lash, 1994: 65). He adds later that the

combination of ritual and formulaic truth guarantee it (1994: 79), or else they become only custom and habit. Thus, it sounds as if tradition is always linked to consciousness and to what content people give it.

To the question, "Could you define a tradition?", Anthony Giddens (1998:127) answers: "Tradition brings us back yet again to the theme of time. It is a means whereby the past lives in the present and thereby shapes the future." This question of time is central to the idea of tradition as defined by Paul Ricoeur (1985: 318) who defines the notion of tradition first by the idea of traditionality which is a process: "...tradition formally conceived as traditionality already constitutes a far-reaching phenomenon. It means that the temporal distance which separates us from the past is not a dead interval but a transmission which generates meaning".

If we live in post-traditional order, or a de-traditionalised one as Heelas argued (in Heelas, Lash, Morris, 1996), it is because "traditional society" was made up of "traditional societies," which in turn formed around a centre. It gave a pluralist vision of the world, whereas nowadays, the world is one that globalises, i.e., standardises. Heelas focuses on the question of heritage described by Ricoeur (1985: 320): "The notion of tradition understood as the traditions, means that we are never in an absolute position of innovators, but first always in relative situation of heirs".

Tradition depends upon ritual which often adopts the form of a collective ceremonial. It works through repetition, and it involves some irrational aspects, as its legitimisation comes from codes. Actually, tradition is something diffuse, it pervades all aspects of social life without the necessity of being bound to a particular institution (Giddens, 1991: 194). According to Heelas (1996: 2), our times are ones of de-traditionalisation, which involves a shift of authority from "without" to "within". It is also Giddens' point of view as loss of tradition, or the post-traditional order (Giddens, 1991), means to live in a more reflexive way, which comes down to having, as sole

reference, oneself (Giddens, 1996). Heelas' (1996) radical thesis stipulates that tradition gradually declines in significance and eventually ceases to play a meaningful role in the lives of most individuals. A contrasting thesis sees de-traditionalisation as competing, interpenetrating or interplaying with processes that maintain, rejuvenate, or construct tradition. Those period contrasts, i.e., of modernity versus late modernity or postmodernity, are associated with radical before-and-after theorising and are seen as incapable of handling the many-voiced complexities of our times. De-traditionalisation cannot occur when people think of themselves as belonging to the whole. It does occur when there is a loss of faith in what the traditional has to offer. As people are not supported any longer by the repetition of long-standing actions or models, they seek their own truth (Giddens, 1996). The impression given is one of a confusion between repetition and social cohesion: cohesion disappears because repetition has ended. Giddens argues that this is not a compulsory factor (1994: 56).

Nevertheless, the problem might not reside in the abandonment of tradition, but rather in its distortion (Vattimo, 1990: 59), which though preserving it, empties it of meaning. This point concurs with what has been developed by authors previously quoted: postmodern times are characterised by simulacra, which might mean the readjustment of traditions without any substance. Giddens cites the souvenir and heritage industry (1991:131) and also notes that traditions become so rigid that they reach an ultimate point, which is fundamentalism. Robert Bellah associates also the question of meaning with tradition writing (1991: 191): "The major social problems of this stage [post-traditional world] is not the takeoff from an agricultural society into an industrial one but the many new problems that arise once that departure has occurred. One problem that seems to characterise the most advanced contemporary societies is a major crisis of meaning. Not only are there severe problems of meaning with respect to the traditional culture, which now seems remote in many ways, but there is also the profound question: 'So what?' once technological proliferation has begun."

Bellah associates the question of meaning with tradition. In this sense and according to the previous development on postmodernity which reveals the loss of it, a process of return to tradition would be also associated to a recovery of meaning. The author (1991: 191) refines again this approach: "Symbols are cultural objects that serve to give meaning to act or objects by classifying them in categories that include other acts and objects. Meaning in this sense is location in a context, in a larger interrelated framework defined by values or norms of a more general order than the specific act or object. Human action is almost, by definition, symbolic action, which is another way of saying that it always involves culture. One prerequisite to the functioning of any action system is that action must have a meaning. When action becomes meaningless, the organization of system of action, whether personality or social system, is seriously threatened."

Following Ricoeur (1985: 328) describing traditions as "contents bearer of meaning" and "propositions of meaning", it might be said that if there is no more substance, it is because, propositions of meaning have been lost. Re-traditionalisation would indicate revival propositions of meaning. In following Ricoeur's terminology (1985: 328), the loss or reinvention of tradition carries also significant consequences for questions of legitimacy, because Tradition is an instance of legitimacy.

The question of territory is also posed. Lash argues (1999) that we are deprived of a "home ground," or territory, and that this is the essential feature applying to any domain and which lies at the root of all the problems of fragmentation, loss of myth, and the other points already mentioned. In a traditional frame of thought, the land is the most important element, so de-traditionalisation is explained by this lack of territory, or groundedness. As was seen above,

Maffesoli brought up the land theme. The theory developed around the “terroire” concept runs counter to this tendency. It is difficult indeed to decide whether the two theories are actually in opposition, or if they coexist in a world where they alternate like the swing of a pendulum. Our world is globalised to such an extent that people are seeking first differentiation and secondly re-rooting. What is acknowledged is the absence of meaningful life, with MacDonaldisation, reification, and massification. It might be said that globalisation, at a certain stage, produces localisation, since the system cannot extend beyond without it.

C. Postmodernity and Paganism

A whiff of Paganism pervades literature on postmodernity through different approaches. The word itself is generally used, and refers to, a variety of elements, concepts, philosophies and domains. Jean François Lyotard (1977a) describes Paganism as a canvas composed of fibres incarnated by typologies such as subjects, comprising theology, literature, politics, psychology; methods including semiotics, structure, dialectics, analysis; and the doctrines of unconscious, desire, the senses, hope, transcendence. It is a form of programme, something to create, then, but as in weaving. Paganism indeed is equivalent to the social part, which is not regulated, but not in the sense developed by Maffesoli later, that of a dionysiac sense, which again reveals an institutionalised dimension of society. It is total freedom and affords room for total creativity. Central to Paganism is the fact that it grants no authority to discourse. Forms of worships are multiple, and none of them embodies the one and only Truth.

Maffesoli also recalls the feminine principle, incarnated for example in the French Republic. This feminine principle resembles the Pagan principle defined here. Lyotard underlines three fundamental elements of Paganism which do not merely apply to the area of religion, but are also inherent to how a society functions: freedom, the refusal of domination, and femininity. In

another book (1977b:43), he recalls that *pagus* was the term designating outlying areas located on the fringes of centres of population. In such areas, the unknown prevails, and he opposes them to home and security. *Pagus* is a synonym for discovery and mystery. Here a frightening aspect is also to be found, as the entities that people worship can be angry and jealous, they lie and transform themselves. Pagan divinities are described as skilled narrators, and the individual must understand what they say, understand the stories they reveal. It is impossible to buy their indulgence with offerings or prayers. Lyotard says again that Paganism should not be equated with impiety, since people make agreements with the gods through small offerings or treaties of alliance. The discussion suggests that Paganism is linked to the idea of freedom, and moreover, to the idea of insecurity and absolute freedom. But it should not be confused with nihilism (1977a: 175), for it contains a religious element.

According to Vattimo (1988: 155-156), there is a form of Paganism deprived of the enchantment of the old gods, which concludes the secularisation process of our societies. It is built on the ruins of the Western culture, representing a mixture of nostalgia for history and aspirations to progress. But this new Paganism which pervades society is non religious. Contrary to Vattimo, as already mentioned in connection with the figure of Dionysus, Michel Maffesoli also analyses our postmodern societies in terms of Paganism, but in a positive light. He speaks of the “social divine” and asks: “Is it not the nature of the divinity to be plural? Gods and not one God? Plurality of gods is finally another way to describe this immanent transcendence, and in overcoming the *principum individuationis*, keeps solid the social tie.” (1991a:171). This plurality of values embodies a form of polytheism.

D. Postmodernity and religion

A postmodern world engenders postmodern religions. Several sociologists tried to define what the term “postmodern religions” means and their features, sometimes basing their definitions on

postmodernity as analysed by such philosophers as Lyotard or by other sociologists. Guy M  nard (1999) focused on the main breaks with modernity:

1. "Master Narratives," or "Metanarratives," are abandoned in favour of "little narratives."
2. The new myths have an ephemeral aspect as compared with the traditional religious forms that lasted for centuries.
3. New religious forms are assembled from miscellaneous materials: they are "do-it-yourself" projects; this "do-it-yourself" process becomes systematised and acquires a value of its own.
4. The inversion of myth and ritual: whereas ritual once expressed a myth, nowadays it is as if new rituals created new myths.
5. These new myths and new rituals, in turn, create new tribes, according to Michel Maffesoli (1991b), based upon affectivity, and do not correspond to a rational choice.

Beckford (1992:19) lists the following points about religion and Postmodernity:

1. A refusal to regard positivistic, rationalistic, instrumental criteria as the sole or exclusive standard of worthwhile knowledge.
2. A willingness to combine symbols from disparate codes or frameworks of meaning, even at the cost of disjunctions and eclecticism.
3. A celebration of spontaneity, fragmentation, superficiality, irony, and playfulness.
4. A willingness to abandon the search for over-arching or triumphalist myths, narratives or frameworks of knowledge.

Postmodern forms of religion would accordingly be characterised by diversity as opposed to unity, with "cross-references between, and pastiches of, different religious traditions; collapse of the boundary between high and popular forms of religion, and an accent on playfulness or

cynicism.” He asserts that some New Age groups and religious movements correspond to this description and these criteria. Nevertheless there is a holism in new spiritualities which claims universality and, in this sense, resembles modernity because of a triumphalist truth prevailing over the particularities. There is also a kind of rationality in “the stress on the interconnectedness of all living things, the heightened awareness of ‘the global circumstance,’... the strong sense of evolutionary equilibrium and change, the belief in the possibility of personal and social transformation.” According to Beckford (1992: 21) this is similar to a revision of the “Enlightenment project” and “the new religious leaders of today may be ‘do-it-yourself-ers,’ but they are not exponents of the religious equivalent of ‘art for art’s sake.’” (Beckford,1992: 21).

Perhaps it is difficult to eliminate all rationality given human nature. Postmodern authors come out against the pre-eminence of rationality, but they have not declared that it must be totally eliminated. And “art for art’s sake” might be found, even if there is a quest, and this quest is for meaning. It may merely be a precursor stage. Zygmunt Bauman (Heelas et al., 1998: 70) defines a form of post-religion as marked by a positive outlook indeed, in the sense that it does not harp on human weaknesses, like Christianity for example, but, on the contrary, insists on the development of human potential. But the author does not say whether there is a divine component in it or not. Here in fact, religion becomes more a matter of consumerism than of elevation. So its characteristic is not verticality, but total “this-worldly-ness.”

E. Chapter Conclusion

In seeking to understand Pagan movements with respect to postmodernity and tradition, I intend to ask whether they are the invention of some individuals via pastiche, or else the continuation of something perpetuated, and, if so, in what form. It also means examining the question of sacredness, morals, ethics and lasting values. The principle of eternity through a chain is perhaps

at issue, meaning that some values and regards on the world still continue through some people and religious or cultural movements over the centuries.

For the purposes of this thesis, I follow a model in which the different approaches to postmodernity suggest that it is a stage of civilisation which carries both complementary and contradictory characteristics: the concept itself revolves around the individual and community, not economics. Postmodern societies search for an individual well-being which is nevertheless impossible because there is no more community, and consequently no more secure and durable ties guaranteeing this well-being. People are free, but abandoned to themselves because there is no longer a referent which guarantees coherence, a situation which thus leads to chaos. This is accompanied by a loss of meaning, as the absence of referent means also an absence of legitimization. There is a search for community through neo-tribalism; nevertheless the focus is still on the "I" and not on the "we". Such neo-tribes express multiple identities, rather than a single one based on common values and a common project; people still do what they want to. A contradiction can also be seen here: postmodernity is synonym of homogenization and massification on one side and of multiple identities on the other.

Tradition is understood through several senses: as a process which revolves around the notion of heritage, as bearer of meaning and as legitimating instance. To seek to understand Pagan movements also means to envisage the possibility of there being a narcissistic phenomenon and how strong it is: do people merely seek to reinforce their egos, or/and are they sincere? Are there elements of pastiche and simulacra, and if so, which and to what extent? And which instance legitimates the traditions understood as contents bearers of meaning? Pagan movements today might also convey something of

postmodernity, perhaps transmodernity, in the sense that they might express a turning point in our civilisation.