IV. Reinventing Tradition
Introduction
In contrast to the idea of collective identity as based on a somehow given and coherent sameness, poststructuralist scholars presume a continuous reinterpretation of identities, characterized by varying contextual and situational parameters. Thus, any kind of identity appears fluid, fragmented, imagined, shifting, and, as such, multiple in character. Since identities are understood to be contingent social constructs, they are subject to continuous affirmation, negotiation, and alteration by human beings. This process is intrinsically performative, i.e. not solely conveyed by ideology but embodied in day-to-day communicative practices, whether through habitual repetition, mimetic citation, or speech acts. To conceptualize identity as a socio-cultural construction comes as no surprise in social anthropology. Emile Durkheim already analyzed communicative processes in their capacity to raise group solidarity, yet he conceived of human beings whose given physical reality precedes its cultural transformation into a social body. The full analytical potential of a concept that regards identities as social constructs reveals itself when this dichotomy is relinquished and attention is drawn to the body as itself a cultural construct. With this intention, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* challenged the analytical value of disconnecting “gender” from “sex” (a paradigmatic distinction for the first generation of “women’s studies”). According to Butler, even what appears to the self as a physically given sex is already a discursive product. Raising awareness of this constructiveness was supposed to have a liberating effect on women and those individuals who transgress gender stereotypes due to their sexual preferences, their “queer” self-perception, or both. Identity was not only considered as created in and through social practice, but performativity emerged as the major force in its construction process (see also McKenzie).1