

Conflicts and Antinomies of Multiple Modernities from Eisenstadt

Paulo Vitorino Fontes

University of the Azores

Centre for Humanistic Studies

Rua da Mãe de Deus, 9500-321, Ponta Delgada, Portugal

E-mail: paulo.v.fontes@uac.pt

Abstract:

The idea of multiple modernities implies that the best way to understand the contemporary world and to explain the history of modernity is to conceive of it as a history of the successive constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programmes. The concept “multiple modernities” has two implications. The first is that modernity and Westernization are not identical; the Western pattern or patterns of modernity do not constitute the only “authentic” modernities, although they have been historically precedent and constitute a central reference for other visions of modernity. The second is that the term modernities includes the recognition that these modernities are not “static” but are in continuous transformation. These transformations lead to the postmodernity that has occupied a primary place in the contemporary debate of ideas, pervading a myriad of diverse issues with a wide range of political ramifications.

Keywords: Multiple modernities, Post-modernities, Institutional and ideological patterns

Introduction

With the resurgence of historical, cultural and postcolonial studies that discuss the modern condition, but no longer only modern, the hybridity of social practices and discourses that characterise the modern condition is manifest.

The main aim of our work is to expose and reflect on the different possibilities and readings of modernity. We will question a homogenizing vision of modernity and modern people which, being univocal, is problematic. We intend to contribute to the clarification of the debate that opposes pluralism versus uniformity in almost all contemporary societies.

This work follows the approach of the sociologist Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt who has contributed considerably to the understanding of cultural and structural processes of change, highlighting their tensions and antinomies as opposed to what could be understood as a uniform process of development of modernity. From various works of Eisenstadt we intend to problematize in the theoretical level modernity understood in its plurality and continuous dynamics, highlighting the various models of development of modernity, what the author calls multiple modernities. The present work, after having framed the approach to be presented and before the final conclusions, is divided into five

parts: the first part presents some considerations about the concept of multiple modernities; the second part seeks to deepen the configurations of the programme and political process of modernity; the third part characterises the different antinomies, social movements and conflicts of modernity; the fourth part identifies the effects of globalisation on modernities, and the fifth part seeks to understand the structural change of the public sphere and “postmodernity” as a critique of modernity.

On the concept of multiple modernities

According to Eisenstadt (2001, 139), the concept of *multiple modernities* “contradicts the long prevailing views in academic and general discourse”, since they all assumed that the programme of modernity and the institutions arising from it would eventually subject all societies in the process of modernisation.

Mainly after World War II, it became evident that the homogenising and hegemonic purposes of the Western programme of modernity would not support these assumptions. Despite the structural changes in family, economic, social and political life that took place in various parts of the world, these developed according to different dynamics and interpretations of the original Western project, giving rise to various ideological and institutional patterns (Eisenstadt 2001, 139-140).

“The idea of multiple modernities presupposes - as the best way to understand the contemporary world (...) to see it as a continuous history of constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programmes” (Eisenstadt 2001, 140). It is relevant from here, according to the author, the way to explain the history of modernity, with implications in the differentiation between modernity and westernization, because despite modernity having started in Western Europe and remaining, in a certain way, as a reference for the rest of the world, it assumes multiple forms and cultural programs. In this way, Eisenstadt (2001, 140) confronts us “with the problem of what constitutes the common core of modernity?”. A problem which in view of the transformations in the “classical” nation-state models and the revolutionary states in particular, due to globalising influences, assumes special importance.

The programme and the political process of modernity

The cultural and political programme of modernity began in western and central Europe from the 17th century onwards, implying different ideological and institutional assumptions. “An intense reflexivity thus developed around the basic ontological premises of the structures of social and political authority” (Eisenstadt 2001, 141).

The cultural and political programme of modernity implied, despite distinct conceptions of human action, the central idea of human autonomy: the emancipation of men and women from the bonds of traditional political and cultural authority. Great importance was attached to the autonomous participation of individuals in the constitution of the social and political order of society. There was, according to Eisenstadt (2001, 141-142), an opening to different possibilities of building a new order in rupture with all the traditional legitimations, with two complementary and even contradictory orientations around the best ways of achieving social construction through

conscious human activity. On the one hand, there was a belief in the possibility of narrowing the gap between the transcendent order and the mundane order and, on the other, there was recognition of the legitimacy of numerous objectives and interests, both individual and collective, with implications for the emergence of various interpretations of the common good.

For Eisenstadt (2003, 121-129), the modern programme implied a radical transformation of the conceptions and premises of political order and process, with the opening of the modern political arena to the active participation of the periphery of society. The incorporation of protest themes from the periphery into the centre around the ideas of equality and freedom, justice and autonomy, solidarity and identity, were constituted as the central elements of the modern project of human emancipation. The ideology and the fundamental assumptions of the modern political process were constituted, with the emphasis on three essential characteristics: changes in the centre-periphery relationship as the main objective of the political dynamic; a great politicisation of the demands and conflicts of and between the different sectors of society and the continuous dispute over the definition of the domain of the political.

Another consequence of modernity was the change in the construction of the boundaries of collectivities and collective identities, according to Eisenstadt (2003), by constituting new meanings of the fundamental elements of collective identities: civil, primordial and universalist, transcendental or sacred. New links were drawn between the public sphere and cultural collectivities. In rupture with the pre-modern era, collective identities are no longer acquired as received and pre-ordained by a transcendent authority or ancestral custom.

Jürgen Habermas (2003) highlights a structural transformation of the public sphere, pointing out several virtues of the bourgeois public sphere of the 18th century, in which the social status of its members was not relevant. Everyone would be able to take part in public discussion and many issues that had not been discussed until then would now be subject to critical discussion. The public sphere, as a free space for critical and rational debate, becomes an instance of control and legitimisation of political power.

Man and women began to play an active role in the construction of society. As the “civilisation of modernity developed”, according to Eisenstadt (2001, 144), various antinomies, internal contradictions and various ideological and political conflicts arose, which gave rise to a continuous critical discourse. Divisions were accentuated both in the world of ideas and in politics, the one that the author highlights as one of the most critical being “that which separated universalist and particularist visions”. A tension manifested in horizons that accept various different values and rationalities as opposed to a vision that sees rationality above all in a totalising way. Paradoxes have also developed within the programme of modernity, between the basic assumptions of the cultural and political dimensions and the major institutional developments. Of particular importance and well explained by Max Weber, according to Eisenstadt (2001, 145) was the creative character implicit in visions that led to the crystallisation of modernity, and the erosion of these visions, the “disenchantment” of the world, due to excessive routinisation and bureaucratisation. This tension is reflected in a tension

between freedom and control, that is, between the emphasis on man's autonomy and the restrictive control caused by the institutionalisation of modern life.

Antinomies, social movements and conflicts of modernity

Several constant tensions in modern political discourse became evident, between totalitarian ideologies and pluralisms, which legitimise numerous abstract individual and group interests, with distinct conceptions of the common good and moral order (Eisenstadt 2001, 145). These tensions were related to the different ways of legitimising modern regimes, and national movements emerged. During the 19th century and until the 1960s of the 20th century significant social movements such as the liberal and the socialist / communist developed, which were followed by two others of nationalist ideology, the fascist and the national socialist. Although these movements arose in specific countries, they became international. Numerous conflicts arose between these movements and others which were not solely ideological in character, such as religious, cooperative, trade unionist or anarchist movements. According to Eisenstadt (2001, 146), "in all modern societies patterns of conflict have developed between social actors around poles founded on the antinomies inherent in the specific political and cultural programmes of modernity". These tensions emerged in all modern collectivities and states, originally in Europe, then in America and gradually throughout the world (Fontes 2016).

The first "alternative" ideological modernities emerged in the 1920s and 1930s in modern political discourse, such as those of the fascist / national socialist type, which sought to redefine the limits of modern collectivities. Their critique of the existing social order denied the universalist components of the cultural programme of modernity, especially in its Enlightenment version. Despite rejecting these components, the movements tried to transpose them in various ways into their particularist visions (Eisenstadt 2001, 147).

There is the continuous development of multiple modernities in Europe, so that Eisenstadt (2003, 559), inspired by Nilüfer Göle (1996), points out that one of the most important characteristics of modernity is simply its potential capacity for continuous self-correction. The 'crystallisation' of European modernity and subsequent diffusion were by no means peaceful. Contrary to the most optimistic predictions that thought of modernity as inevitable progress, at the same time as the crystallisation of modernities took place, numerous contradictions and tensions emerged in the development of capitalist systems and in the growing demands for democratisation in the political arena. Parallel to these factors, international conflicts arose, exasperated by the modern state and capitalist systems, so that war and genocide, although not new phenomena in history, were transformed and intensified, generating specifically modern modes of barbarism. The ideology of violence became more expressive after the French Revolution, becoming one of the components of citizenship for the sustenance of modern states. According to Eisenstadt (2003, 508-509, 547), ideologies of violence were closely related to the fact that the nation-state became the focal point of symbols of collective identity. The extreme manifestation of this ideology was seen in the Holocaust, the concealed barbarity at the centre of modernity, which became a symbol of its negative and destructive potential.

Of the various conflicts and tensions, Eisenstadt (2003, 547) highlights most importantly the ongoing confrontation between more 'traditional' sectors of society and modern sectors. There is tension between the culture of modernity, in its "rational" modern Enlightenment model, which emerged in a dominant form in certain places and periods, and other programmes that reproduced cultural traditions. An enduring ambivalence develops about modern cultures, with particular emphasis on the incessant variation between cosmopolitanism and localism.

With the expansion of modernity, first of all to the Americas, the first radical transformation of its cultural and political premises took place, with the emergence of distinct modernities within Western civilisation. Different patterns of modernity crystallised in the Americas through the discursive conflict with Europe. Although with differences between Latin America, which maintained greater referential links with Europe, and the United States that considered itself the centre of modernity (Eisenstadt 2003, 548).

The different modernities were materialised through imperialism, colonialism, economic and military superiority and communication technologies. Modernity goes beyond the limits of the West, reaches Asian societies and finally Africa. In all these societies the basic model of the territorial state was adopted, followed by the nation state, as well as the fundamental assumptions of Western modernity. But the encounter of modernity with non-Western societies caused profound changes in the assumptions, symbols and institutions of modernity - giving rise to new problems, since the appropriation of the values of modernity implied the choice, reinterpretation and permanent reformulation of imported ideas (Eisenstadt 2003, 549). There was a significant tension between integration into the modern world and ambivalent attitudes towards modernity in general and the West in particular.

The processes of reconstitution of new modern patterns, which do not break with the past but reconstruct many traditional components, are among the most fascinating in the analysis of modern societies, as Eisenstadt stated in an interview with Shalva Weil (2010, 455). The possibility that different civilizations have to create ontological perspectives of their own cultural and institutional patterns, to give different responses to the challenges and opportunities of modernity and to develop and crystallize them according to their particular interests and experiences is, for Eisenstadt (2003, 28), the core of multiple modernities.

Modernities and Globalisation

Deep transformations have taken place in many societies, influenced by the impact of diverse historical traditions and different forms of inclusion in the new modern world system. From the 1960s onwards, the institutional, symbolic and ideological contours of modern national states changed radically with the intensification of the forces of globalisation (Eisenstadt 2001, 151). New social, political and civilisational visions emerged, heralded by new social movements, with emphasis on Western countries, as were the student and anti-Vietnam War movements, which underpinned wider ones - the feminist movement and the environmental movement. These movements were

significant of a broad shift that was no longer around the construction of nation-states, but in the construction of new social, political and cultural spaces (Eisenstadt 2001, 152). These movements are considered *multicultural* and *postmodern*, instead of being carriers of a model of society, as the totalitarian movements, they developed proposals for a multicultural identity politics, with essentially local reach and programmes.

Later fundamentalist movements of a religious nature occurred among Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Hindu and Buddhist communities. Marked by various themes opposed to modernity and, concomitantly or not, adverse to the West. Another type of movement emerged, most prominently in the last two decades of the 20th century, the *ethnic* movement. With horrendous manifestations in Africa and the Balkans, with greater magnitude in the former Yugoslavia. Thus, new types of collective identity emerged, overcoming and no longer centred on the model of the nation-state and the revolutionary state, contested the hegemony of the previous homogenising programmes. All these developments demonstrate the erosion of the fundamental characteristics of modernity and the weakening of the hegemonic ideology of nation-states (Eisenstadt 2001, 152-153).

The efforts to interpret and appropriate modernity on its own terms do not end with fundamentalist movements, but are part of a much wider set of developments, which have taken place all over the world, in a continuous variation between cosmopolitanism and particularist tendencies. For Eisenstadt (2003, 973), the continued salience of the tensions between pluralist and universalist programmes, between multifaceted as opposed to closed identities, and the continued ambivalence of the new centres of modernity towards the main traditional centres of cultural hegemony testify to the fact that, in overcoming the model of the nation-state, these new movements have not overcome the basic problems of modernity.

All the inadequacies, or unfulfilled promises of modernity remain part of the discourses of modernity itself. All of them are deeply reflexive and do not advance conclusive answers. Even if each, in its own way, seeks to provide final and incontrovertible answers to the irreducible dilemmas of modernity, they only reconstruct them in new contexts and in new ways.

Structural change of the public sphere and postmodernity

With the decadence of the public sphere at cultural level, as Jürgen Habermas (1990, 2003) well elucidated, the public that debated culture gave way to a public consumer of culture. Mass culture was developed with great emphasis on entertainment, in a way at the service of the dominant ideology, to the detriment of critical and emancipatory discussion. The mediating function between State and Society has shifted from the public to institutions, embodied in associations and political parties. Previously, public debate legitimised political power; now, the public sphere is used to influence consumers and voters. The public sphere is being refeudalised: public opinion is dominated by private organisations, companies and economic groups, and by the state as public authority. The figure of the political consumer emerges.

The 18th century public sphere, as Graig Calhoun (1996, 462-463) states, although not

marked by rigid boundaries of social stratification, was elitist and, as a greater number of citizens were incorporated into this and public opinion, along with government intervention in the economy, the prominence of multinationals and the emergence of welfare states, political and social decisions moved further and further away from the public sphere. Habermas, like his predecessors of the Frankfurt School, named the phenomenon of mediatic communication in mass society, together with the breakdown of the differentiation between society and state due to the 'administered society', as the most significant transformations that occurred in the structures of the public sphere.

Habermas concerned with the structural change of the public sphere, far removed from the model of bourgeois public space of the eighteenth century, considers that it has decayed until today. Discourse in the public sphere was based on rational-critical argumentation, in which regardless of the identity of its proponents or opponents, the best argument was decisive (Calhoun 1996, 461). The public sphere offered a model of public communication that could potentially realise the ideal of rational guidance of society. Between Kant's optimism and the Marxist critique, the bourgeois public sphere entered a process of decay, but it continues to have a rational, critical and democratic potential that *should* be harnessed. Modernity for Habermas remains unfinished.

Another great theorist and critic of modernity is the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000), who characterises modernity from two distinct periods: solid modernity, characterised by the modern project of control of the world by reason and technique, founded on the solidity of the nation-state, which is called into question after Auschwitz, the Gulacs and the nuclear tragedy and, the second period, liquid modernity, also called postmodernity, characterised by ambivalence, uncertainty, demand for difference and individualisation, mobility; liquidity of relationships, loss of a sense of community and by consumer society.

Exploring Bauman's sociological concept of liquid modernity, with recourse to Adolfo Rocca (2008), this represents change and transience, deregulation and liberalisation of markets. It intends to account for the precariousness of human bonds in an individualistic and privatized society, marked by the transitory and volatile nature of its relationships. Love is fluctuating, without responsibility towards the other, reduced to the faceless bond offered by the internet. Society is constantly changing, uncertain and increasingly unpredictable, and the welfare state is on the decline. We are in a time without certainties, where men and women who fought for civil liberties and to free themselves from tradition now find themselves obliged to be free, assuming the fears and anxieties that such freedom entails.

In order to try to understand what post-modernity is, we call upon the contribution of Onésimo Teotónio Almeida (2006, 6), a Portuguese-American philosopher, who tries to filter from an endless bibliographical list, what may constitute the core of the question. In fact, as this author points out, when we read Lyotard or Foucault, Derrida or Rorty, Habermas or Baudrillard, we get the feeling that the edifice of modernity is not destroyed, but its foundations, which until a century ago seemed unshakable, have begun to crumble.

Almeida (2006, 7) lists the three main shocks caused by postmodernism. The first derives from the awareness of the limits of language. Through the work of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Davidson, Derrida and Rorty, among others, the ability of language to mirror reality has been called into question. The second blow derives from the awareness of the limits of the sphere of reason. The recognition of the existence of a huge part of reality that lies outside the sphere of reason exposes its limits. Finally, there is the realisation of the contingency of values; once the foundation of the idea of God is removed, everything becomes possible in a certain way.

Almeida (2006, 8) believes to be the sense of limits and obstructions of all kinds; the recognition of the distances between utopias and their realisation, between ideologies and praxis; the deeper awareness of the inevitable conflicts in the attainment of antinomic goods - such as freedom and justice, for example - and of the tensions between divergent tendencies - such as the individual and society - which characterise the core of the postmodern worldview.

Returning to Eisenstadt's (2001, 157) reasoning, we can state that the process of continuous transformation of modernity does not imply Francis Fukuyama's (1992) "end of history", in the sense of inevitably reaching a stable society, nor Samuel Huntington's (1996) "clash of civilisations", which would only be possible in a pre-modern framework. On the contrary, there is a continuous reinterpretation of the cultural programme of modernity, in which various groups and movements appropriate and redefine the discourse of modernity on their own terms.

The clashes that persist, as Eisenstadt (Weil 2010, 462) has stated, are "between different states, movements and, above all, between different interpretations of modernity". Multiple modernities continue to emerge, beyond the premises of the nation-state, while at the same time new ways of questioning and reinterpreting the different dimensions of modernity emerge within various societies.

Concluding remarks

Modernity was constituted on the basis of the central idea of the human autonomy: the emancipation of men and women from the bonds of traditional political and cultural authority. Modernity was transformed with the incorporation of protest themes from the periphery into the centre around the ideas of equality and freedom, justice and autonomy, solidarity and identity, which were constituted as the central elements of the modern project of emancipation of the human being.

The concept of multiple modernities presupposes a continuous history of constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programmes. Although modernity began in Western Europe and remains, in a way, a reference for the rest of the world, it takes on multiple forms and cultural programmes. The boundaries of collectivities and the construction of collective identities have been redefined. New links have been forged between the public sphere and cultural collectivities. In rupture with the pre-modern era, collective identities are no longer acquired as received and preordained, but can be constructed by the action of individuals.

One of the most important characteristics of modernity is its potential capacity for continuous

self-correction and its ability to face new problems, never imagined in its original programme, such as the environment, gender equality, and new political and economic conflicts. This constant self-correction, in a dialectic between modern and traditional forces of construction, makes it difficult to establish the limits of modernity.

If on the one hand, we can state with Almeida (2006, 14) that the ideals of modernity are not yet outdated, on the other hand, the postmodern condition is now real. Fragmentation has operated and manifested the limitations of the construction of knowledge and of the social and political practice. Although the world today presents many faces and meanings, which can enrich the democratic pluralism of ideas, there is still no alternative to modernity that is now aware of its limitations.

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