

REVIEW ESSAY

Eisenstadt on Civilizations and Multiple Modernity

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Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution. The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 280pp. incl. index. \$24.95 (pbk), \$69.96 (hbk). ISBN 0521645867 (pbk), 0521641845 (hbk)

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Die Antinomien der Moderne. Die jakobinischen Grundzüge der Moderne und des Fundamentalismus. Heterodoxie, Utopismus und Jakobinismus in der Konstitution fundamentalistischer Bewegungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999. 152pp. DM19.80. ISBN 3518287885 (pbk)

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Paradoxes of Democracy, Fragility, Continuity, and Change*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. 120pp. incl. index. \$29.95. ISBN 0801863090 (hbk)

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Die Vielfalt der Moderne*. Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft 2000, 245pp. DM49. ISBN 3934730124 (pbk)

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's sociological approach to comparative civilization represents one of the most forceful heterodox conceptualizations in contemporary macro-sociological theory. My judgement may surprise. For most western sociologists primarily see Eisenstadt's sociology as one variant of the modernization paradigm taken for granted in mainstream comparative sociology. Only few sociologists have taken notice of Eisenstadt's turn to a comparative-civilizational sociological approach, his outstanding civilizational analyses of Judaism (Eisenstadt, 1992) and Japan (Eisenstadt, 1996), his on-going efforts to analyze the Indian and Islamic civilizations, Latin America and the United States and the recent systematic elaboration of the concept of multiple modernity. I call Eisenstadt's approach a heterodox conceptualization of macro-sociological theory, because it is grounded in the classical modernization paradigm, re-conceptualizes it on the basis of Max Weber's comparative sociology of world religions and develops it in the direction of a global comparative sociology. As a macro-sociological approach *sui generis*, it represents a crucial alternative to the revived mainstream

(neo-) modernization paradigm, the predominant modes of globalization analysis as well as the social-philosophical discourse on modernity and postmodernity.

The far-reaching significance of Eisenstadt's sociological approach to comparative civilizations (as he called it in his first programmatic statement, Eisenstadt, 1986) can be seen in his recent four publications in German and English. As a matter of fact, they form a triad, since the English book *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution* represents an expanded version of the German edition *Antinomien der Moderne* (*Antinomies of Modernity*, with a post-script by Georg Strauth). The main analytical focus here is on the Jacobin dimension of modernity, displayed in heterodox, utopian and fundamentalist movements in western societies as well as replayed in manifold contemporary fundamentalist movements, albeit in different civilizational contexts, in non-western societies. The second book, *Paradoxes of Democracy*, develops the basic premise that the Jacobin dimension of modernity should not be understood simply as a historically past stage of western or a contemporary, though passing, phenomenon of modernizing non-western societies, but rather as a permanent component of modernizing as well as modern societies and polities. The third book, *Die Vielfalt der Moderne* (Multiple Modernity) comprises Eisenstadt's Max Weber lectures in Heidelberg in 1997 organized by Wolfgang Schluchter and translated by Barbara Schluchter. It formulates on the background of Max Weber's comparative-historical sociology, the foundational comparative-civilizational concept of multiple modernity.

I review these four books as a triad, because they belong systematically together and it would be misleading to take them as unrelated research programs on non-western fundamentalism, on the one hand, the third wave of democratization, on the other, and over-arching social-philosophical reflections on the antinomies of modernity. Rather, they develop in coherent and systematic ways the basic idea that despite modern secularization processes, the religious cores of civilizations have as civilizational dimensions, a continual impact on structuring and restructuring societies, polities, cultures and collective identities. From that perspective, modern societies are not simply – as presupposed in mainstream modernization research – historically converging outcomes of varying modernization paths in terms of capitalist industrialization, political democratization, developing welfare regimes and pluralizing secular cultures. Rather, the civilizational religious cores remain cultural sources of differing programs of modernity and as such have a continual impact on the socio-economic, political-institutional, and technical-scientific dimensions of modern societies. The antinomies of modernity derive from the principal tensions between the universalistic-utopian and pluralist-pragmatic components of the religious-civilizational cultural cores. As multiple forms of modernity, they materialize in varying cultural orientations, political-institutional settings and societal configurations in modernizing non-western and western modern societies alike. Thus, the multiple forms of modernity, the paradoxes of democracy and the varieties of fundamentalist movements constitute the theoretical and analytical core of Eisenstadt's sociological approach to comparative civilization.

In *Die Vielfalt der Moderne* Eisenstadt develops his concept of multiple modernity that is at the core of his comparative sociological approach to the dynamics of civilizations. Although in the preface modestly named a report on his on-going research, it presents a particularly illuminating outline of the main coordinates of his macro-sociological civilizational approach. In the first chapter, Eisenstadt situates his concept of multiple modernity in the context of actual controversies (between Fukuyama's convergence thesis and Huntington's divergence thesis) and the underlying differing sociological theories of modernization and modernity; and then defines the features of West European modernity in the specific historical-cultural framework of the European civilization. In the second chapter, Eisenstadt confronts West European modernity with its transformation in the United States under the specific historical circumstances of a settlement and immigration society, the continual importance of heterodox-sectarian movements and their impact on political center formation, political-legal and social institutions, social structure and collective identity formation. In the third chapter, Eisenstadt outlines the reconstruction of western modernity in Asia with the example of Japan. Here, a specific emulation and selection of western modernity takes place in a specific combination of center formation, protest movements, social structure and collective identity within the broader framework of a non-Axial age civilization. And finally in the fourth chapter, Eisenstadt turns to a comparative analysis of fundamentalist movements in western and non-western societies as the heterodox, sectarian and utopian core of the dynamics of civilizations in their characteristic mixture of traditional, anti-modern and modern components.

The starting point of Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernity is the idea that the religious foundations of civilizations function in their continual orthodox/heterodox dialectic as a dynamical civilizational core of modernizing and modern societies and their inter-civilizational variation. From that perspective, the first Western European modernity, on the basis of the Enlightenment and its crystallization through the Great Revolutions, develops a particular kind of modernity in the specific historical-cultural circumstances of the European Christian civilization. The cultural core of this (Western European) modernity, according to Eisenstadt, is a bundle of moral-cognitive imperatives under the premises of the rationalization of the world: the search for higher individual autonomy, the liberation from the traditional constraints of political and cultural authority as well as the growing human cognition, control and transformation of the natural and social world. At the same time, this cultural program of modernity has been constructed and reconstructed within the specific context of the European civilization: the specific Judeo-Greek-Christian cultural universalism and pluralism in its orthodox and heterodox definitions as well as its structural pluralism of center and periphery formation, social movements and political protest (see also Eisenstadt, 1987). The Western European program of modernity spreads out to Central and Eastern Europe, to North and South America and other non-European civilizations through imposition, emulation and incorporation. Yet, according to Eisenstadt, this diffusion process of Western European modernity

does not converge into one common, universalizing or globalizing, western modernity. Rather, western modernity is adopted selectively and transformed culturally within the specific contexts of other civilizations. Again, the specific tensions between orthodox and heterodox orientations and identities, center and periphery formations, social and protest movements are crucial. However, they generate different modes of modernity, differing and diverging from the original Western European modernity.

In *Die Vielfalt der Moderne*, Eisenstadt locates his sociological-comparative approach to civilizations in the context of macro-sociological theory in a much more precise way than in his earlier writings. With the benefit of hindsight, first, it becomes clearer that his earlier scholarly phase has deviated from the classical modernization paradigm in critical respects. Against the structural-functional evolutionism of classical modernization theory, Eisenstadt has always emphasized the historicity, contingency and openness of modernization processes. Against the political and socio-economic structuralism of mainstream modernization research, Eisenstadt has insisted on the crucial importance of the cultural dimensions of modernization and modernity. And by contrast to presupposing the nation-state as the unquestioned analytical unit, as in mainstream comparative modernization research, he has further been aware of the sociological significance of Empires and related civilizations – including the European one. With hindsight, second, the decisive importance of Max Weber for the formulation of Eisenstadt's comparative-sociological approach to civilizations becomes also much clearer. The critical reassessment of Max Weber's comparative sociology of world religions was obviously a crucial turning point in Eisenstadt's second scholarly phase from the late 1960s on. On the one hand, he adopts Weber's insistence on the configurational impact of religion on socio-economic, legal and political structures in a universal comparative perspective and the particular importance of heterodox world-views and movements. On the other hand, he criticizes Weber's western-centric view which sees the unique dynamics of western modernity in contrast to other rather stagnant civilizations. Instead, Eisenstadt emphasizes the varying manifold dynamics of civilizations on the basis of their religious-civilizational cores and their continuing significance in generating varying types of modernity.

Also, third, the implications of Eisenstadt's civilizational approach regarding mainstream comparative sociological research become much clearer. Despite his criticism of Max Weber's Euro-centrism, Eisenstadt basically renews Max Weber's program of sociology as a combination of cultural and social sciences. Compared to Schluchter's elaborate reinterpretation of Weber's research program, Eisenstadt does not remain on the reconstructive level, but (in the context of the current state of sociological comparative research) actually carries through a comparative sociology of world civilizations in the spirit of Max Weber. On these Weberian foundations, Eisenstadt develops a principal alternative to mainstream comparative sociology and its presupposition, application and operationalization of a one-sided structural modernization paradigm. In mainstream sociology, the structural tendencies of modernization such as structural differentiation, capitalist market

development, democratization or secularization are predominantly seen as self-moving universalizing macro-forces instantiated in empirical comparative indicators. Against this view, Eisenstadt's counter-paradigm convincingly insists on the crucial impact of cultural forces and collective identities – to be explored only with hermeneutic methods – on the dynamics of modernization processes and modernity programs in specific civilizational contexts. As put forward in *Die Vielfalt der Moderne* on a primarily macro-sociological level and only underpinned with two major exemplary case studies of modern societies, however, the methodological and analytical implications of this counter-paradigm may not become fully clear.

In *Die Antinomien der Moderne* (= AM) in the German version and in *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution. The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity* (= FSR) in the English version, Eisenstadt undertakes a comparative inquiry of the cultural dynamical core in different civilizations. Following Max Weber, Eisenstadt here focuses on the decisive importance of fundamentalist religious orientations and movements that are essential for the revolutionary breakthrough and rise of Western European and American modernity as well as for the dynamics of non-western forms of modernity. Taking the expanded English version *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution* as a guideline, Eisenstadt starts in his first chapter (= AM, ch.1) with the analysis of the varying heterodox, sectarian and utopian proto-fundamentalist movements in the different Axial Age Civilizations as the historical forerunners of modern fundamentalist movements. Then in the second chapter (= AM, ch. 2), he analyzes the transformation of sectarian utopianism into the cultural and political program of modernity in the western Great Revolutions. In the next step in chapter 3 (= AM, chs. 3, 4 and 5), Eisenstadt defines fundamentalism as a modern Jacobin anti-modern utopia and heterodoxy and justifies this definition by comparing different types of modern fundamentalism such as communist, fascist and communal-national movements. Then in chapter 4 (= AM, ch. 6), he analyzes the variability of fundamentalist movements in the different historical settings of civilizations. And finally in chapter 5 (= AM, ch.7), on the basis of these varying fundamentalist movements, he concludes with some considerations on multiple modernity.

Eisenstadt's major claim in these two related books is that contemporary fundamentalist movements are basically modern movements even if they promulgate anti-modern or anti-Enlightenment ideologies (FSR, p. 1; AM, p. 7). As other scholars, he takes the term 'fundamentalism' from the American Protestant fundamentalist movements emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and transfers this term to all varieties of contemporary principled movements that contest the western form of modernity in the name of religious traditions. In contrast to many observers and social scientists, however, he conceptualizes the manifold contemporary fundamentalist movements not as traditionalist and anti-modern, but rather as thoroughly modern phenomena. The basic justification for this claim is that these modern fundamentalist movements incorporate central components of western Jacobinism: the radical

totalistic insistence on autonomy and participation of individuals and collectives. In this sense, Eisenstadt claims that modern fundamentalist movements are characterized by totalistic transformations of traditions rather than by traditionalist, anti-modern forms of mobilization. On this basis, Eisenstadt brings together seemingly disparate phenomena from pre-modern heterodox, sectarian and utopian movements to the revolutionary origins of western modernity in the Great Revolutions, the crucial impact of French Jacobinism on communist and fascist movements in the West, and anti-western forms of fundamentalist movements and ideologies in non-western modernizing civilizations and societies. Following Max Weber's premise that Protestant sectarianism was essential for the rise of western modernity, Eisenstadt generalizes this premise by claiming that modern fundamentalist movements have to be understood as integral parts of modernization and modernity in non-western societies.

From this perspective, Eisenstadt analyzes the varying contemporary forms of fundamentalism as hybrid mixtures between principled forms of religious traditions and incorporated forms of western Jacobin totalism. On the one hand, Eisenstadt relates the varying contemporary forms of fundamentalist movements to the different civilizational contexts in which they evolve. Accordingly, Eisenstadt analyzes the different religious cores of the Axial Age civilizations as historically foundational, but continually reconstructed traditions. Crucial here are the varying tensions and antinomies between the transcendental and mundane, the universalistic and particularistic, the totalistic and pluralistic dimensions in the orthodox as well as heterodox currents in the civilizational religious cores. Through political center formation and the formative influence of the political elites, they have a crucial impact on political-legal institutions, socio-economic structures and collective identities. Of particular importance here are the heterodox, sectarian and utopian movements as challenges to and transformations of orthodox center formations. Depending on the type of religion and particularly the constitutive role of transcendental-universalistic elements in the heterodox-sectarian currents, there evolved different types of proto-fundamentalist movements in all Axial Age civilizations. In this sense, Eisenstadt assumes a basic historical, though varying and continually reconstructed, continuity between proto-fundamentalist and modern fundamentalist movements. On the other hand, Eisenstadt relates the varying contemporary forms of modern fundamentalism to the transformed impact of western Jacobinism on non-western civilizations and societies. Western Jacobinism itself represents a totalistic-secularist transformation of heterodox-sectarian dimensions within European Christianity, which reemerged in modern communist and fascist movements and influenced the non-western civilizations through the expansion of the Western European civilization. Modern fundamentalist movements in non-western civilization thus combine western totalistic impacts with specifically civilizational forms of heterodox universalism and utopianism. In this sense, Eisenstadt analyzes these movements in their varying forms and historical settings as thoroughly modern forms of fundamentalism.

It is not possible here to pay adequate tribute to Eisenstadt's rich comparative analysis of the varying fundamentalist movements in different historical-civilizational settings. But it is worthwhile to emphasize again the particularity of Eisenstadt's sociological inter-civilizational approach. In contrast to mainstream modernization and neo-modernization paradigms, Eisenstadt does not conceive cultural modernization as a process of cultural differentiation and rationalizing secularization dissolving religious traditions. Rather, he conceptualizes cultural modernization as a process of secularizing reconstruction of religious traditions. This includes also the preservation and restructuring of the totalistic and pluralistic religious tensions in processes of cultural modernization and programs of modernity. From this perspective, fundamentalist movements are not simply a transitional phenomenon from traditional to modern societies, but a permanent potential in modern societies as well. Accordingly, and also in contrast to the prevailing globalization theories, Eisenstadt does not interpret contemporary fundamentalist movements as a principled reaction to universalizing processes of western modernity in order to keep the authenticity of traditional religions and ways of life. Rather, he views them as modernizing cultural dynamics in non-western civilizations and as major vehicles in the construction of multiple forms of modernity. Thus, on the historically continually reconstructed foundations of the religious cores of civilizations, the fundamentalist and totalistic dimensions are permanently present in the civilizational dynamics towards multiple modernity. The actualization of these totalistic potentials, however, depends on the specific historical contexts and institutional configurations, constraining or mobilizing them as social forces.

In *Paradoxes of Democracy* Eisenstadt takes up one of the key components of western modernization and modernity: the political institution of democracy and its progressing diffusion, particularly after the breakdown of Soviet communism, throughout the world. Again, the basic idea is that democracy as the core institution of political modernity should not be seen simply as a taken-for-granted universalizing western political regime, but as embedded in the antinomies and multiplicity of modernity and the related fragility of and variation in democratic regimes. To begin with, Eisenstadt discusses the opposite conceptions of constitutional and participatory democracy in western political thought (ch. 1). He then relates these contemporary debates to the historical roots of constitutional democratic regimes in European state-formation and their transformations in the Great Revolutions (ch. 2). He then analyzes the basic premises of the cultural and political programs of modernity (ch. 3), the antinomies and tensions of cultural modernity (ch. 4) as well as their reflection in the pluralistic and Jacobin tendencies in the political program of modernity (ch. 5). These tensions and contradictions are crystallizing in the historical formation of political regimes, the generation of protest movements and the continual redefinitions of the political (ch. 7). They are also reproduced in the development of social movements in modern constitutional regimes (ch. 8). Eisenstadt finally concludes with the two major opposing forces within modern democratic regimes: the pluralistic

consolidation of constitutional democracies on the basis of social trust (ch. 9) and the potential deconsolidation of modern democracy as embedded in the antinomies of modernity (ch. 10).

The central idea of *Paradoxes of Democracy* can again be grasped best by highlighting the particularity of Eisenstadt's comparative civilizational approach to democracy, its structural tensions and empirical variations. In the political and social sciences, on the one hand, there predominates a procedural-institutional definition of democracy as competitive-electoral regime. This Schumpeterian minimalist definition is accompanied by an extensive discussion of the substantive dimensions of democracy, such as liberty, equality and participation, and broadened by the consideration of structural prerequisites such as a developed state, the formation of a civil society and the rule of law. On this basis, there has evolved a widespread comparative literature on the worldwide development, waves and reversals, transitions and consolidations of democracy. In political theory and political philosophy, on the other hand, the debates focus rather on the substantive dimensions of democracy such as liberty, equality and distributive justice, the forms of citizenship, civil society and communitarian forms of political community. These debates develop within modernist and postmodernist frameworks and represent less an empirical-theoretical assessment than a normative-critical reflection on the substantive bases and dimensions of democracy. In this spectrum between comparative politics and political theory, Eisenstadt develops a highly original comparative-sociological approach that includes and at the same time transcends the political-institutional and normative-cultural oppositions in contemporary political theory and comparative-political research.

Eisenstadt's starting point is to interpret the oppositions between the formal and material definitions of democracy, the institutional settings and the cultural-political orientations or the constitutional and participatory conceptions of democracy as tensions in the political program of modernity and to anchor them in the antinomies of the cultural programs of modernity. From this perspective, the institutional forms of political modernization are closely linked to and rooted in the universalistic and particularistic, as well as in the totalistic and pluralistic antinomies of modernity. This means that the processes of democratization cannot be reduced to structural dimensions of political modernization such as state formation, nation building and the broadening inclusion of people into politics. Rather, the processes of institutional democratization or constitutionalization are dependent on the related cultural value-orientations and mentalities in their pluralistic-pragmatic as well as Jacobin-totalistic components. This is true not only for the incipient stages of political modernization in the revolutionary constitution of modern democracies, but also for the various developing stages of modern democracies, their continuous reproduction, reversal or reconstitution. Accordingly, political center-formation is interrelated to social protest and social movements. The types of social protest and movements are shaped by the institutional environment as well as the forms of social protest and social movements have an impact on the transformation of political regimes. Yet, this interplay is not just a matter of power balances and mobilization resources, but

is closely intertwined with the cultural repertoires and collective identities. Eisenstadt emphasizes the role of collective identities in their primordial, sacred and political dimensions as well as the tensions and antinomies between these components. Additionally, he stresses the crucial importance of social trust for the stability of democracy and the lack or loss of trust for the fragility of democracy.

Paradoxes of Democracy is essentially a conceptual outline of a comparative-civilizational approach to the dynamics and variations in democratization. As such, it should be seen as a conceptual correlate to the comparative analysis of fundamentalist movements in different national and civilizational settings. *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution* analyzes the development of heterodox, sectarian and utopian belief systems and value-orientations in political protest and social movements as the cultural core of varying modernization dynamics and of the generation of multiple modernity. *Paradoxes of Democracy* concentrates on the interaction between political institutions and cultural-civilizational dynamics, antinomies in political modernization processes and political programs of modernity. In its empirical focus, *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution* concentrates on proto-fundamentalist and contemporary fundamentalist movements in non-western civilizations. *Paradoxes of Democracy*, inversely, focuses in its empirical examples primarily on the western experience; here, the most interesting empirical parts are the exemplary discussion of the internal variations of the processes of democratization and types of democracy within the European civilization. But as the comparative references to the United States, Japan, India, and Israel demonstrate, Eisenstadt's sociological-comparative approach is particularly important for the processes of democratization in non-European civilizations as well. Against the predominating (neo-) modernist premise of a worldwide convergence to western democracy, Eisenstadt convincingly claims that the different civilizational settings have an impact not only on the varying forms of fundamentalist movements, but also on the multiple forms of developing democracies.

In highlighting the main conceptual links between the multiple forms and antinomies of modernity, the variations in fundamentalist movements and the varying paradoxes of democracy, I have emphasized some of the core elements of Eisenstadt's comparative-sociological approach to civilizations. As I have argued, his approach can be seen as a consequential renewal and further development of Max Weber's cultural-cum-social scientific program of a comparative historical sociology. The starting point of Eisenstadt's approach is a critical movement through the western-centric modernization paradigm of mainstream comparative sociology, but the result is a forceful multi-civilizational counter-paradigm of a truly global sociology. The fruitfulness of this approach has been shown particularly in Eisenstadt's own comparative analyses of the Japanese and Jewish civilizations. The innovative potentials of analysis are also indicated in his many investigations on other western and non-western civilizations.

At the same time, future sociological debate should further clarify key issues of Eisenstadt's approach (for instance, the reconstruction of the religious cores of

civilizations; the relation between religion and its secular transformations; the micro-sociological foundations of the macro-sociological processes; or the relationships between culture, social structure and economy). Future sociological research should also follow and probe its methodological and analytical devices. Only then, as it seems to me, the full appreciation of the fundamental significance of Eisenstadt's comparative-sociological approach to civilizations for contemporary sociology will be possible.

References

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