The Dialogue between Cultures or between Cultural Interpretations of Modernity. Multiple Modernities on the Contemporary Scene

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt*

1. The Notion of Multiple Modernities

It is the major contention of my argument that the relations and encounters between different societies on the contemporary scene is not a dialogue between cultures but between different – to no small extent indeed cultural – interpretations of modernity, and that it can be best understood in terms of the continuity of the cultural development and changeability of multiple modernities.

The notion of multiple modernities goes against the view of many of the classical theories of sociology and above all those of the theories of modernisation and of the convergence of traditional societies which were very influential after the Second World War – views which assumed that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in modern Europe and the basic institutional constellations that emerged in connection with it would ultimately take over, prevail, in all modernising and modern societies. The notion of multiple modernities goes also against two very influential recent theses about the contemporary world – namely that of the «end of history» as promulgated by F. Fukuyama and that of the «clashes of civilisations» as promulgated by S.P. Huntington.

Contrary to all these views, the idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world – indeed to explain the history of modernity – is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs and cultural patterns of modernity[1]. At the same time one of the most important implications of the term «multiple modernities» is that modernity and Westernisation are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only «authentic» modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others.

* Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology and Anthropology and The Truman Research Institute, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. Speech offered at the European Union Conference on «Intercultural Dialogue», Brussels, 20-21 March 2002.

[1] See S.N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*, in «Daedalus», vol. 129, n. 1, Winter 2000, pp. 1-29.

This view of multiple modernities entails certain assumptions about the nature of modernity. The first such assumption is that modernity is to be viewed as a distinct civilisation, with distinct institutional and cultural characteristics. According to this view, the core of modernity is the crystallisation and development of mode or modes of interpretation of the world, or, to follow Cornelius Castoriadis' terminology, of a distinct social «imaginaire», indeed of the ontological vision, of a distinct cultural program, combined with the development of a set or sets of new institutional formations – the central core of both being, as we shall see later in greater detail, an unprecedented «openness» and uncertainty.

This civilisation, the distinct cultural program with its institutional implications, crystallised first in Western Europe and then expanded to other parts of Europe, to the Americas and later on throughout the world, giving rise to continually changing cultural and institutional patterns which constituted, as it were, different responses to the challenges and possibilities inherent in the core characteristics of the distinct civilisational premises of modernity.

2. The Cultural and Political Program of Modernity

The modern project, the cultural and political program of modernity as it developed first in the West, in Western and Central Europe, entailed distinct ideological as well as institutional premises. It entailed some very distinct shift in the conception of human agency, of its autonomy, and of its place in the flow of time. It entailed a conception of the future in which various possibilities which can be realised by autonomous human agency – or by the march of history – are open. The core of this program has been that the premises and legitimation of the social, ontological and political order were no longer taken for granted; there developed a very intensive reflexivity around the basic ontological premises as well as around the bases of social and political order of authority of society – a reflexivity which was shared even by the most radical critics of this program, who in principle denied the legitimacy of such reflexivity.

The central core of this cultural program has been possibly

most successfully formulated by Weber. To follow James D. Faubian's exposition of Weber's conception of modernity:

Weber finds the existential threshold of modernity in a certain deconstruction: of what he speaks of as the «ethical postulate that the world is a God-ordained, and hence somehow meaningfully and ethically oriented cosmos...

... What he asserts – what in any event might be extrapolated from his assertions – is that the threshold of modernity has its epiphany precisely as the legitimacy of the postulate of a divinely preordained and fated cosmos has its decline; that modernity emerges, that one or another modernity can emerge, only as the legitimacy of the postulated cosmos ceases to be taken for granted and beyond reproach. Countermoderns reject that reproach, believe in spite of it...

... One can extract two theses: Whatever else they may be, modernities in all their variety are responses to the same existential problematic. The second: whatever else they may be, modernities in all their variety are precisely those responses that leave the problematic in question intact, that formulate visions of life and practice neither beyond nor in denial of it but rather within it, even in deference to it...[2]

It is because of the fact that all such responses leave the problematic intact, the reflexivity which developed in the program of modernity went beyond that which crystallised in the Axial Civilisations. The reflexivity that developed in the modern program focused not only on the possibility of different interpretations of the transcendental visions and basic ontological conceptions prevalent in a society or societies but came to question the very givenness of such visions and of the institutional patterns related to them. It gave rise to the awareness of the existence of multiplicity of such visions and patterns and of the possibility that such visions and conceptions can indeed be contested[3].

Such awareness was closely connected with two central components of the modern project, emphasized in the early studies of modernisation by Dan Lerner and later by Alex Inkeles. The first such component is the recognition, among those becoming and being modernised – as illustrated by the famous story in Lerner's book about the grocer and the shepherd – of the possibility of undertaking a great variety of roles beyond any fixed or ascriptive ones, and the concomitant receptivity to different communication messages which promulgate such open possi-

[2] J.D. Faubion, *Modern Greek Lessons. A Primer in Historical Constructivism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 113-115.

[3] S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics*, in «European Journal of Sociology», tome 23, no. 2, 1982, pp. 294-314; Id. (ed.), *The Origins and Diversity of Axial-Age Civilizations*, cit.

bilities and visions. Second, there is the recognition of the possibility of belonging to wider translocal, possibly also changing, communities[4].

Concomitantly, closely related to such awareness and central to this cultural program were the emphasis on the autonomy of man; his or hers, but in the initial formulation of this program certainly «his» – emancipation from the fetters of traditional political and cultural authority and the continuous expansion of the realm of personal and institutional freedom and activity, and of human ones. Such autonomy entailed several dimensions: first, reflexivity and exploration; and second, active construction, mastery of nature, possibly including human nature, and of society. Parallelly, this program entailed a very strong emphasis on autonomous participation of members of society in the constitution of social and political order; on autonomous access, indeed of all members of the society to these orders and their centers.

It was the combination of all these components of the new ontological vision that gave rise to what Bjorn Wittrock and others have designated as the great promissory themes or visions of modernity – the view of modernity as bearing within itself the continual progress of knowledge and of its rational application; of human emancipation, of continual inclusion of sectors of society within its frameworks and of the expansion of such emancipatory forces to entire humanity.

But it was also this combination that bore within itself the seeds of the possibility of the great disappointments and traumas in the attempts to realise these promising themes.

The modern program entailed also a radical transformation of the conceptions and premises of the political order, of the constitution of the political arena, and in the characteristics of the political process. The core of the new conceptions was the breakdown of traditional legitimation of the political order, the concomitant opening up of different possibilities of construction of such order, and the consequent contestation about the ways in which political order was to be constructed by human actors. It combined orientations of rebellion and intellectual antinomianism, together with strong orientations to center-formation and institution-building, giving rise to social movements, movements of protest as a continual component of the political process.

4 D. Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, Glencoe (Ill.), Free Press, 1958; A. Inkeles, D.H. Smith, *Becoming Modern. Individual Change in Six Developing Countries*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1974.

These conceptions were closely connected with the transformation of the basic characteristics of the modern political arena and processes. The most important of these characteristics was first the openness of this arena and of the political process. Second a strong emphasis on at least potential active participation of the periphery, of «society», of all its members in the political arena. Third were the strong tendencies to permeation of the peripheries by the centers and of the impingement of the peripheries on the centers, of the concomitant blurring of the distinctions between center and periphery. Fourth was the combination of the charismatisation of the center or centers with the incorporation of themes and symbols of protest which became components of the modern transcendental visions as basic and legitimate components of the premises of these centers. Themes and symbols of protest – equality and freedom, justice and autonomy, solidarity and identity – became central components of the modern project of emancipation of man. It was indeed the incorporation of such themes of protest into the center which heralded the radical transformation of various sectarian utopian visions into central components of the political and cultural program.

This program entailed also a very distinctive mode of construction of the boundaries of collectivities and collective identities. There developed new concrete definitions of the basic components of collective identities – the civil, primordial and universalistic and transcendental «sacred» ones; and of the modes of their institutionalisation. There developed first, a strong tendency to their absolutisation in ideological terms; second, the growing importance of the civil components thereof; third, a very strong connection between the construction of political boundaries and those of the cultural collectivities; and fourth, the closely related strong emphasis on territorial boundaries of such collectivities and a continual tension between the territorial and/or particularistic components of these collectivities and broader, potential universalistic ones. At the same time, the most distinct characteristic of the construction of collectivites, very much in line with the general core characteristics of modernity, was that such construction was continually problematised in reflexive ways. In some even if certainly not total contrast to the situation in the Axial Civilisations, collective identities were not taken as given or as pre-ordained by

some transcendental vision and authority, or by perennial customs. They constituted foci of contestations and struggles, often couched in highly ideological terms[5].

A very central component in the construction of collective identities was the self-perception of a society as «modern», as bearer of the distinct cultural and political program – and its relations from this point of view to other societies – be it those societies which claim to be – or are seen as – bearers of this program, and various «others».

A central aspect of the cultural and political program of modernity has been, to follow Claude Lefort's terminology, the loss of «markers of certainty» – and the concomitant continual search for such markers.

Two basic complementary but also potentially contradictory tendencies about the best ways in which such construction could take place developed within this program. One such major direction was a «totalising» tendency crystallised in the Enlightenment, but above all in the Great Revolutions which gave rise, perhaps for the first time in the history of humanity, to the belief in the possibility of bridging the gap between the transcendental and mundane orders, of realising through conscious human actions in the mundane orders, in social life, some of the utopian, eschatological visions.

Such totalising direction could be of a «technocratic» variety, based on the assumption that those in the know, those who mastered the secrets and arcana of nature and of man, of human nature, could devise the appropriate institutional arrangements for the implementation of human good, of the good society. The second way in which such totalising direction could develop emphasized attempts at the reconstruction of society in a very totalistic way according to a cognitive – usually moral or religious – vision. These two directions could sometimes, as in the case of the Communist ideology, come together. The second major tendency in the process of reconstruction of society was rooted in the growing recognition of the legitimacy of multiple individual and group goals and interests and of multiple interpretations of the common good.

[5] S.N. Eisenstadt, B. Giesen, *The Construction of Collective Identity*, in «European Journal of Sociology», tome 36, no. 1, 1995, pp. 72-102; E. Shils, *Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties*, in Id. (ed.), *Center and Periphery. Essays in Macrosociology*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1975, pp. 111-126.

3. The Continual Changeability of Modernities

These uncertainties and the search to overcome them were exacerbated by the fact that the concrete contours of the different cultural and institutional patterns of modernity as they crystallised in different societies have indeed been continually changing, due to the combination of the tensions inherent in the cultural and political program of modernity and the continual institutional social, political and economic developments attendant on the development and expansion of modernity.

The institutional and cultural contours of modernities were continually changing, first of all because of the internal dynamics of the technological, economic, political and cultural arenas as they developed in different societies and expanded beyond them.

Second, they were continually changing in connection with the political struggles and confrontations between different States, between different centers of political and economic power that constituted a continual component first of the formation of European modernity, and later through the continual expansion of European, later American and Japanese modernity. Such confrontations developed already within Europe with the crystallisation of the modern European State system and became further intensified with the crystallisation of «world systems» from the 16th or 17th centuries on.

Third, they were continually changing because of the shifting hegemonies in the different international systems that developed in the wake of the continual developments in the economic, political, technological and cultural arenas, and in centers thereof[6].

Fourth, they were changing because of the continual confrontations between interpretations promulgated by different centers and the elites and the concrete developments, conflicts and displacements attendant on the institutionalisation of these premises.

Fifth, they were continually changing because these confrontations activated the consciousness of the contradictions and antinomies inherent in the cultural program of modernity and the potentialities given in its openness and reflexivity; and gave rise to the continual promulgation by different social actors, especially the different social movements, of continual re-

[6] E. Tiryakian, *The Changing Centers of Modernity*, in E. Cohen, M. Lissak, U. Almagor (eds.), *Comparative Social Dynamics: Essays in Honor of S.N. Eisenstadt*, Boulder (CO)-London, Westview, 1985; Id., *Modernization. Exhumetur in Pace (Rethinking Macrosiology in the 1990s)*, in «International Sociology», vol. 6, no. 2, June 1991, pp. 165-180; Id., *The New Worlds and Sociology - An Overview*, in «International Sociology», vol. 9, no. 2, June 1994, pp. 131-148.

interpretation of the major themes of this program and of the basic premises of the civilisational visions and on the concomitant grand narratives and myths of modernity.

Sixth, they were continually changing because the very expansion of modernity beginning in Europe entailed the confrontation between the concrete premises and institutional formations as they developed in Western and Northern Europe and other parts of Europe – and later beyond Europe – of the Americas and later in Asia, in the Islamic, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Japanese civilisations.

The continual changeability of the institutional and ideological patterns of modernity do indeed indicate that the history of modernity is best seen as a story of continual development and formation, constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs of modernity and of distinctively modern institutional patterns, and of different self-conceptions of societies as modern – of multiple modernities[7].

The development and expansion of modernity was not, contrary to the optimistic views of modernity as progress, peaceful. It bore within it also very destructive possibilities – which were indeed voiced, and also often promulgated, by some of its most radical critics, who saw modernity as a morally destructive force, and emphasized the negative effects of some of its core characteristics. The crystallisation of the first and the development of later modernities were continually interwoven with internal conflicts and confrontations, rooted in the contradictions and tensions attendant on the developments of the capitalist systems and, in the political arena, the growing demands for democratisation and with international conflicts in the framework of the modern State and imperialist systems. Above all they were closely interwoven with wars and genocides, repressions and exclusions constituted continual components thereof. Wars and genocide were not, of course, new in the history of mankind. But they became radically transformed and intensified, generating continuous tendencies to specifically modern barbarism, the most important manifestation of which was the ideologisation of violence, terror and war – manifest most vividly first in the French Revolution. Such ideologisation emerged out of the interweaving of wars with the basic constitutions of the nation-states, with those States becoming the most important agent – and arena – of constitution of

7 See S.N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*, cit., and the entire volume devoted to this topic.

citizenship and symbols of collective identity; with the crystallisation of the modern European State system and of European expansion beyond Europe and with the intensification of the technologies of communication and of war.

These destructive forces, the «traumas» of modernity which brought into question the great promises of modernity, emerged clearly after the First World War, became even more visible in the Second World War, in the Holocaust, even if they were paradoxically ignored or branched out from the discourse of modernity in the first two or three decades after the Second World War. Lately they have re-emerged again in a most frightening way on the contemporary scene, in the new «ethnic» conflict – in parts of the Balkans, especially in the former Yugoslavia, in many of the former republics of Soviet Russia, in Sri Lanka and in a most terrible way in African countries, such as Rwanda. These are not outbursts of old «traditional» force – but outcomes of modern reconstruction and seemingly «traditional» forces in a modern way – just as the fundamentalist and religious communal movements developed within the framework of the processes of modernity and they cannot be fully understood except within this framework.

The multiple and divergent modernities of the «classical» age of modernity have crystallised during the 19th century and in the first six or seven decades of the 20th century in the different territorial nation- and revolutionary States and social movements that have developed in Europe, in the Americas, and in Asian and African societies until after the Second World War. These contours – institutional and symbolic, ideological contours of the modern national and revolutionary States and movements which were seen as the epitome of modernity – have changed drastically on the contemporary scene.

These changes developed in a new historical period and context, the most important characteristics of which was the combination first, of changes in the international systems and shifts of hegemonies within them; second, of processes of internal ideological changes in Western societies; third, the development of new processes of globalisation; and fourth, of far-reaching processes of democratisation, of the growing demands of new social sectors into the centers of their respective societies, as well as into international arenas.

The most important aspect of the new international scene that

developed in this period was first, the weakening or transformation of some «old» Western hegemonies and of the modernising regimes in different non-Western societies; often in situations in which the perception of such weakening became relatively strong among active elites in the non-Western countries – as for instance after the October War and the oil shortage in the West. Second, a crucial event on the international scene was the demise of the Soviet Union and of the salience of the ideological confrontation between Communism and the West – a confrontation which was set within the framework of original Western cultural and political program of modernity, and the demise of which could be interpreted as an exhaustion of this program and as the «end of history».

Parallelly there took place continuous shifts in the relative hegemony of different centers of modernity – first European and US ones, moving to East Asia and back to the US – shifts which became continually connected with concomitant growing contestations between such centers around their presumed hegemonic standing.

Second, these developments became closely related to internal ideological changes in Western society, with the development of what has been called «post-modern» or «post-materialist» orientations; and to the concomitant continual decomposition of the relatively compact image of the «civilised man», of the styles of life, of construction of life worlds, which were connected with the first original programs of modernity.

Third, there developed in this period multiple new processes of economic and cultural globalisation, manifest in growing autonomy of world capitalist forces, of processes of intense social and economic dislocations of many social sectors, of growing gaps between different sectors of the population, between global and local cities; and the erosion of many middle-class sectors; of intense movements of international migrations, and of the concomitant development on an international scale of social problems, such as prostitution, delinquency, traffic in drugs and the like. In the cultural arena the processes of globalisation were closely connected with the expansion especially through the major media of what were often conceived in many parts of the world as uniform hegemonic Western, above all American, cultural programs or visions.

Fourth, at the same time there developed throughout the world

growing demands of many social sectors to greater access to participation in the central frameworks of their societies – i.e. to growing democratisation.

All these processes entailed a far-reaching transformation of the «classical» model of the nation and revolutionary States which were predominant in the earlier period. All these processes reduced, despite the continual strengthening of the «technocratic» rational secular policies in various arenas – be it in education or family planning – the control of the nation-state over its own economic and political affairs. At the same time the nation-states lost some of their – always only partial – monopoly of internal and international violence to many local and international groups of separatists or terrorists without any nation-state or the concerted activities of nation-states being able to control the continually recurring occurrences of such violence. Above all the ideological and symbolic centrality of the nation and revolutionary States, of their being perceived as the major bearers of the cultural program of modernity and the basic frameworks of collective identity and as the major regulator of the various secondary identities, became weakened, and new political, social, and civilizational visions developed.

It was in this new context that there developed new movements such as above all the fundamentalist movements which developed in Muslim, Protestant and Jewish communities; the communal religious movements which developed especially in the Hinduist and Buddhist ones; all of which promulgated strong anti-modern and especially anti-Western themes; as well as many of the so-called «new» social movements that developed initially in Europe and the US such as women's and the ecological movements related to or rooted in the student and anti-Vietnam war movements of the late sixties and seventies, and lately many of the anti-globalisation ones. These movements developed in tandem with the crystallisation of new social settings and frameworks, such as the new, especially the Muslim, Chinese and Indian diasporas, new types of ethnic minorities like the Russian ones which emerged in many of the successor States of the Soviet Union or those in the former Communist East European countries.

These movements and sectors contested the older homogenising cultural programs promulgated by the different nation-states; they claimed their own autonomous place in central

institutional arenas – educational programs, public communi-
cations, media outlets, positing far-reaching claims to the re-
definition of citizenship and of rights and entitlements con-
nected with it. It is not that they do not want to be «domiciled»
in their respective countries. Indeed part of their struggle is to
become so domiciled, as compared to classical models of assimi-
lation – but on new terms. They wanted to be recognised in the
public spheres, in the constitution of civil society in relation to
the State as culturally distinct groups within them promul-
gating their collective identities and not to be confined only to
the private sphere. Thus they posit far-reaching claims to the
redefinition of citizenship and the rights and entitlements con-
nected with it. They do make claims – as illustrated among
others, for instance in the recent debate about *laïcité* in France,
both for the construction of new public spaces and for the
reconstruction of the symbols of collective identity promul-
gated in respective States. Concomitantly there developed with-
in these movements and sectors an important, even radical,
shift in the discourse about the confrontation with modernity
and in the conceptualisation of the relation between the West-
ern and non-Western civilisations, religions or societies.

Many of these movements tend also to be active on the inter-
national scene. Thus for instance, many of the separatist, local
or regional settings, develop direct connections with trans-
national frameworks and organisations such as for instance the
European Union. Parallelly the various religious, especially
fundamentalist movements – Muslim, Protestant, Jewish – have
become very active on the international scene and they influ-
ence the activities of their – and other – States in international
affairs and the interrelations between them.

Within these movements the basic tensions inherent in the con-
stitution of modern States, in the modern political program,
especially those between the pluralistic and totalistic orien-
tations; between utopian or more open and pragmatic attitudes,
between multifaceted as against closed collective identities.

All these changes constituted important transformation of the
discourse of modernity and of the attempts to appropriate and
interpret modernity in their own terms, seemingly continuing
the contestations between different earlier reformist and trad-
itional religious movements. These movements have reconsti-
tuted in new ways the problematic of modernity in new histor-

ical contexts, in new arenas. First among these new ways is the worldwide reach and diffusion (especially through the various media) of such movements and of the confrontations they entail; second their politicisation, their continual interweaving with fierce contestations formulated in highly political ideologies and terms; and third, a crucial component of these reinterpretations and appropriations of modernity is the continual reconstruction of collective identities in reference to the new global context and contestations between them. Such contestations may indeed be couched in «civilisational» terms – but these very terms are already couched in terms of the discourse of modernity, defined in totalistic and absolutising terms derived from the basic premises of the discourse of modernity, even if it can often draw on older religious animosities. When such clashes or contestations are combined with political, military or economic struggles and conflicts they can indeed become very violent.

Fourth, the reconstructions of the various political and cultural visions and such collective identities on the contemporary scene entail a very important shift in this discourse with respect to the confrontation between the Western and non-Western civilisations or religions or societies and the relations of these confrontations to the Western cultural program of modernity. As against the seeming, even if highly ambivalent, acceptance of these premises combined with their continual reinterpretation that was characteristic of the earlier reformist religious and national movements, most of the contemporary religious movements – including the fundamentalist and most communal religious movements – as well as the more general discourse of modernity which developed within these societies, promulgate a seeming negation of at least some of these premises. They promulgate a markedly confrontational attitude to the West, to what is conceived as Western, and attempts to appropriate modernity and the global system on their own non-Western, often anti-Western, terms – but formulated in the terms of the discourse of modernity. The confrontation with the West does not take with them the form of searching to become incorporated into the new hegemonic civilisation on its own terms, but rather to appropriate the new international global scene and the modernity for themselves, for their traditions or «civilisations» – as they were continually promulgated and reconstructed

under the impact of their continual encounter with the West. These movements attempted to completely dissociate Westernisation from modernity and they denied the monopoly or hegemony of Western modernity, and the acceptance of the Western cultural program as the epitome of modernity. Significantly enough many of these themes are espoused also, even if naturally in different idioms, by many of the «post-modern» movements.

All these developments and trends constitute aspects of the continual reinterpretation, reconstruction of the cultural program of modernity; of the construction of multiple modernities; of attempts by various groups and movements to re-appropriate modernity and redefine the discourse of modernity in their own new terms, and of continual changes in the definitions of the realm of the political in the modern scene.

All these various movements and discourses promulgated distinct programs and discourses of modernity – and did not just perpetuate older traditions. They all constituted contestations about the reinterpretation, appropriation and representation of the continual discourse of modernity and one central theme of the discourse – which developed already in Europe – has been the durability of the continuation and upholding of the distinct traditions of different societies in confronting the expansion of modernity. At the same time they entail a shift of the major arenas of contestations and of crystallisation of multiple modernities and modern political programs and of the construction of modern collective identities, from the arenas of the nation-state to new areas in which different movements and societies continually interact and cross each other.

These movements and developments give rise not to «closed» civilisations but to a great variety of continually interacting modern civilisations in which even the inclusive tendencies are constructed in typically modern ways, and articulate continually in different concrete ways in different historical settings, the antinomies and contradictions of modernity.

A crucial component of these reinterpretations and appropriations of modernity is the continual reinterpretation of collective identities – and these may indeed be couched in «civilisational» terms – but these very terms are already couched in terms of the discourse of modernity. However unlike in the case of older traditional religious confrontation in the contemporary

scene «civilisations» tend to be defined in totalistic and absolutising terms derived from the basic premises of the discourse of modernity – even if it can draw on older religious animosities.

The confrontation or clashes between the various movements, as well as the more general discourse of modernity were not between different civilisations but between different interpretations or programs of modernity, in which the «civilisational» component was mostly, even if certainly not above all focused on the construction of collectivities, of collective identities, and could, of course become also closely related to confrontation about power within or between different societies, exacerbating the destructive potentialities of modernity.

Moreover, these continual reinterpretations and contestations were not static. In all societies these attempts at interpretation of modernity were continually changing under the impact of changing historical forces. But in each of these periods there developed not just one model of modernity, but multiple modernities in the shaping of which the historical experiences and civilisational cultural heritage of their respective societies played a very important role as was the case already in Europe.