

## Alternative ways of modernisation: comparison of individual societies as nation states in 19th and 20th century Western societies

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Shmuel N. Eisenstadt

Alternative Ways of Modernization - Comparison  
of Individual Societies as Nation States in 19th  
and 20th Century Western Societies

I

The focus of this paper will be to examine, on the basis of a comparative analysis of the European experience of modernization in the middle 19th century and early 20th century, the basic theoretical assumptions of theories of modernization and convergence of individual societies. As is well known, these theories, seemingly derived from the European experience, have assumed a universal unilinear trend of development concomitant with modernization.

These theories have also assumed, implicitly or explicitly, that such characteristics of modern society - as the rationality, nation-state and class society - derived from the specific European heritage of the combination between the Judeo-Christian and Greek cultural heritage; the heritage of political tribal tradition and structural pluralism, will be more or less concomitant with the development of modernity and industrialization.

But not only the experience of non-European societies but also that of the different European societies indicates not only that these assumptions cannot be accepted in full, but enables to go beyond some such general concepts as tradition and historical experience to explain the variability of processes of modernization.

It is by now, as against the assumptions of the earlier studies of modernization, that there is no single - but many different - roads to modernization.

## II

The studies of development and modernization that became, from the Second World War, a major focus of research in most of the social sciences in sociology, political science, economics, and anthropology, heralded the revival of the interest in comparative macro-sociological studies, in the dynamics of a variety of civilizations with a strong focus on the relations and contrast between modern and premodern Western and non-Western civilizations, and of the historical process which constituted one of the major foci of classical sociological theories.

The emphasis of this renewed macro-societal and comparative interest was on how to "develop" the "underdeveloped" societies, and engendered a whole spate of studies in all the social sciences, utilizing

new analytical approaches and new methodological tools of inquiry - post-Keynesian and econometric studies in economics, in attitude studies, in survey research, in demographic and ecological research, and in analyses in sociology and political science. This work also linked up with some of the major theoretical developments in sociology and political science, especially with the "systemic" approaches to social and political life. The most influential of these systemic approaches was, as indicated above, the structural-functional approach developed in sociology by Talcott Parsons and taken up and further elaborated in political science by Gabriel Almond, David Easton, and others. These approaches defined societies or polities as systems, that is, as entities that have boundaries of their own and to distinguish them from their environments, which have mechanisms that maintain such boundaries and assure their continuity.

This combination of developments in sociological theory with research into the "Third World" reopened the major classical problems of sociological theory. These included the characteristics and internal dynamics of various types of societies, the nature of processes of change and of the conditions of stability of such societies, the process of transition from one type of society to another, and the extent to which such transition evinces a discernible universal evolutionary tendency from the simple to the complex. This analysis of historical process came back to the forefront of sociological concern and theory.

The research that developed out of these concerns and dominated comparative studies in the social sciences in the 1950's and 1960's attempted first of all to identify the differences between traditional and modern societies. These were defined in many ways by using sociodemographic indices such as urbanization, occupational structure, spread of media of communication, and the like. They were also defined in terms of structural differences - traditional societies being characterized, to use Parson's terminology, by particularistic and ascriptive criteria of role allocation, and modern societies by universalistic and achievement criteria. These differences between traditional and modern societies were couched in most of the studies in terms of the respective range of systemic problems with which they could cope or of the environments - both internal (social, cultural) and external (technological, economic) - which they could "master."

From this perspective, traditional societies were perceived as basically very restrictive and limited, whereas modern societies were seen as much more expansive and adaptable to a widening range of internal and external environments and problems. Special emphasis was given to the ability to cope with change in general, and with economic development and industrialization in particular. The qualities of modern life, such as rationality, liberty, or progress, with which the classics of sociology were deeply concerned were here subsumed

under these "expansive" "systemic" qualities of societies. Although not entirely neglected, those other qualities of the modern order were seen, or assumed, to follow naturally from the capacity to grow and to absorb change.

The vision of the historical process which was connected with all these developments was very much in line with the classical evolutionary one - stressing very much the passage of most societies through relatively similar stages moving towards the common end stage of modernity.

### III

From the early and, especially, the mid sixties, the momentum of research as well as the development on the world scene gave rise to far-reaching criticisms of these assumptions. These criticisms arose from a variety of vantage points, and they touched not only on the problems of development and modernization, but also on some very central questions of sociological analysis. Behind much of the debate there also loomed political and ideological differences, sometimes forcefully expressed. The two major foci of these criticisms were the alleged ahistoricity and Europocentricity of this initial model of modernization, and the closely connected doubts about the validity of the tradition-modernity dichotomy.

The allegation of the ahistoricity and Western centrality of this model was developed in two concrete directions that bear directly on the problem of the dynamics of civilizations. One such direction pointed to a reappraisal of the importance of historical continuity in shaping the contours of societal development.

While it would be out of place to analyze here in detail the whole spate of criticisms of the theories of modernization and of the convergence of industrial societies which have developed, it might be worthwhile to point out some of the highlights. The most crucial aspects of these criticisms have been the recognition, first, of the systemic viability of the so-called transitional systems; second, the very closely related recognition of the importance of traditional elements as well as, possibly, of various international factors in shaping the contours of these regimes.

Perhaps one of the most important developments in this context was the concept of "patrimonialism" to describe the political regimes of some new states. The use of the term "patrimonial" to describe many of the contemporary regimes pointed out the inadequacies of the central concepts and assumptions in the major studies of modernization, first by showing that many of these societies and states did not develop in the direction of modern European nation-states; second, by demonstrating that these societies were not necessarily a "transitional"

phase along an inevitable path to this type of modernity; third, by indicating that there was nevertheless some internal "logic" in their development; and last, by emphasizing that at least part of this logic or pattern derived from the traditions of these societies themselves.

Thus, these criticisms of the initial model of modernization stressed the importance of analyzing contemporary developments in various societies in terms of their "unfolding" of the traditional forces inherent in them, rather than their alleged movement toward a fixed end-stage.

The other - and, in a sense, opposite - direction that these criticisms took tended to emphasize the unique historical experience of the modern era. This approach, most clearly apparent in the works of many modern Marxists or semi-Marxists, stressed that the modernization process was not universal or inherent in the nature of every society. Rather, it was stressed that it represented a unique historical situation connected with the various aspects of European expansion, and especially with the expansion of capitalism, and of the consequent establishment of a new international system composed of hegemonous and dependent societies.

Out of the latter there developed the strong stress on the necessity to analyze different modern and modernizing societies from the point of



view of their place in the international world (especially capitalist) system and to see how their place in this system influences their institutional contours and dynamics.

#### IV

Out of all these developments there emerged the recognition of the possibility of a new perspective on the historical process in general and processes of modernization in particular.

The single most important aspect of the new perspective on the historical process is the recognition of the fact that the institutional dynamics of societies are greatly shaped by their specific historical experience and that, in the shaping of such historical experience, two aspects seem to be of special importance: one are their cultural traditions and the other is their political-ecological settings in general and their place in the respective international system or systems in which they participate, in particular.

Such a new perspective was made possible by the reexamination of several central theoretical issues - the two most important, in the present context, and both of which were examined in previous research, were the reappraisal of the nature of tradition and its place in social life; and the analysis of international relations and systems.

The concept of tradition, which initially was in many works used as a sort of a general residual category to explain major aspects of institutional structures which could not be explained in terms of the premises of the initial model of modernization, became defined in a more specific way; the different aspects of tradition became differentiated and their relations to concrete institutional patterns specified.

It was shown that in most general terms tradition is perhaps best viewed as the process - or at least part of the process - through which different levels of aspects of reality are culturally and socially constructed and transmitted in society; i. e., as the reservoir of the most central social and cultural experience of a society or civilization.

This reservoir of experience is not, however, some sort of general, undifferentiated "store"; it is rather composed of several components - the relations between which are complex and often paradoxical.

The most important of these components are: first, some generalized modes or orientations of perception and evaluation of the modes of perception of social reality of the cosmic and of the socio-political order, which, for convenience, we shall call cultural "codes". Second are the symbols of collective identity and third the major modes of legitimation of the social and political order.

One of the most important findings of our research was that these different aspects of tradition can change in different tempos. It was

found, paradoxically enough, that the different cultural orientations tend to be more continuous than the symbols and "contents" of collective identity, even if the latter often are seen as more stable and continuous.

Second, this analysis has indicated how these codes influence and shape some very basic parts of the social structure. We were able to indicate in a systematic way - beyond rather vague indications found in the earlier literature on traditions or in sociological analysis - which aspects of the institutional structure which cannot be fully explained in terms of levels of technological development or of structural differentiation and specialization, are influenced by such codes. The most important among these are: structure of authority; conception of justice; the structure of power and of political struggle; principles of social hierarchization; the definition of the scope of membership of different communities - all of which greatly influence the major types and policies undertaken in any society, and the perception of social problems within them.

Accordingly such conceptions do also greatly influence the modes of the integration - moral, legal or communicative - of the societies in which they are prevalent and the major patterns of their legitimation.

Such cultural premises do also greatly influence the "worlds of knowledge", the basic cognitive symbols prevalent in different societies; as well as the process of institutionalization of cognitive institutional

activities and attitudes in general and scientific in particular in different societies.

Third, these conceptions - and their institutional derivatives - are "carried", by special type of social actors and social mechanisms - especially by several types of cultural, educational and political elites and frameworks - and may, often, cut across different "concrete" societies. They do also often exhibit dynamics of their own.

The major characteristic of such actors and especially the degree of their institutional autonomy, their internal solidarity and their relations to broader strata are of crucial importance for understanding the ways in which different cultural orientations shape the major aspects of institutional frameworks.

Fourth, this research has indicated that many of these institutional aspects seem to be continuous across different historical settings; across changes in levels of technological development and is closely related to continuities in some basic social and cultural orientations and to the construction of their traditions even in modern settings.

Fifth, our research has also indicated in a systematic way that the very process of institutionalization of the cultural orientations generates potentialities for tensions, conflicts and change. These potentialities are rooted first in the contradictions that develop within

the systems or sets of codes themselves; second, in their application to broad institutional complexes; and third, in the differences between various complexes of codes and various types of institutions and interests. Because of this the tendency to tensions, conflicts and protest is inherent in human societies and it influences the patterns of organizational and symbolic dimensions of social change. This tendency appears in different patterns of rebellion, social conflicts and heterodoxies, the constellations of which vary greatly between different societies and which greatly influence their special historical experience and dynamics of each of them.

But the concretization of these various tendencies takes place in different political-ecological settings. Here of special importance are two aspects of such settings. One, very strongly stressed in recent researches has been the importance of international political and economic systems in general and of the place of different societies within them, and of different types of relations of hegemony and dependency in particular. Second was the more general recognition of a great variety of different political-ecological settings of societies - such as differences between small as against large societies, their respective dependence on internal or external markets and the like.

Both these aspects influence greatly the ways in which the institutional contours and dynamics of different societies tend to develop.

In all these ways our research has attempted to analyze how the great variety of historical experience and of the traditions of different societies and civilizations has influenced the ways in which they shape their ways and destinies in the modern world . In this way the researches have enabled a reappraisal of the processes of development and modernization in general and on the problems of convergence and divergence of modern and modernizing societies in particular.

## V

In most of the literature this new perspective has been mostly applied to non-Western societies, showing how the assumptions derived from the western roots of modern social science are not easily applicable to non-Western societies. Such reappraisal should, however, also be attempted with respect to Western societies themselves enabling a more differentiated approach to them and to their proper place in comparative framework.

The starting point of such a reappraisal should be the analysis of the specific combination of cultural orientations and structural characteristics of (Western) European societies themselves.

European civilization was characterized by a very high degree of multiplicity and cross-cutting of cultural orientations and structural settings. The symbolic pluralism or heterogeneity of European society was evident in the multiplicity of traditions out of which its own cultural

tradition crystallized - the Judeo-Christian, the Greek, the Roman, and the various tribal ones - and in the concomitant multiplicity of cultural codes and orientations. The most important among these orientations or codes was the emphasis on a high autonomy of the cosmic, cultural, and social orders and a high level of mutual relevance between them which was defined in terms of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane order; the multiplicity and complexity of the different ways of resolving this tension, either through worldly (political and economic) or otherworldly activities.

The second cultural orientation prevalent in European civilization was a high level of activism and commitment of broader group and strata to these orders. Third was the conception of a high degree of relatively autonomous access of different groups and strata to these orders - to some degree countered by, and in constant tension with, the strong emphasis on the mediation of such access by such bodies as the Church or the political powers. Fourth was the definition of the individual of an autonomous and responsible entity with respect to access to these orders.

This multiplicity of symbolic orientations became connected with a very special type of structural-organizational pluralism in Europe. This type of pluralism differed greatly from the one that developed, for instance, in the Byzantine Empire, which shared many aspects of its cultural traditional models with Western Europe. Within the Byzantine

Empire this pluralism was manifest in a relatively high degree of structural differentiation within a rather unified sociopolitical framework in which different social functions were apportioned to different groups of social categories. The structural pluralism that developed in Europe was characterized, above all, by a strong combination between lower - but continuously increasing - levels of structural differentiation on the one hand and continuously changing boundaries of different collectivities, units, and frameworks on the other.

Between these collectivities and units there did not exist a clear-cut division of labor. Rather there tended to develop among them a continuous competition over their respective standing with respect to the different attributes of social and cultural order, over the performance of the major societal functions - be they economic, political or cultural, as well as over the very definition of the boundaries of ascriptive communities.

The combination of these symbolic models and structural conditions generated several basic institutional characteristics of traditional European civilization. The most important among them were: (a) multiplicity of centers; (b) a high degree of permeation of the peripheries by the centers and of impingement of the peripheries on the centers; (c) a relatively small degree of overlapping of the boundaries of class, ethnic, religious, and political entities and their continuous restructuring; (d) a comparatively high degree of autonomy of groups and strata and of their access to the



centers of society; (e) a high degree of overlapping among different status units combined with a high level of countrywide status ("class") consciousness and political activity; (f) multiplicity of cultural and "functional" (economic, or professional) elite, a high degree of cross-cutting between them and close relationship between them, and broader, more ascriptive strata; (g) relative autonomy of the legal system with regard to other interpretive systems - above all the political and the religious ones; and (h) the high degree of autonomy of cities as autonomous centers of social and structural creativity and identity formation.

In close relation to these institutional features of traditional European civilization there also developed in Europe special patterns of change. These patterns were characterized by: (a) high degree of predisposition of secondary elites, relatively close to the center, to be the major carriers of religious heterodoxies and political innovations; (b) a relatively close relationship between these secondary elites within broader social strata, and hence also to movements of rebellion; (c) a concomitant predisposition to develop on the part of these elites and groups - and often also to combine - activities oriented to center formation with those of institution building in the economic, cultural, and educational spheres.

Out of these qualities of European civilization there developed two major characteristics which persisted to the present. First, was

the continuous confrontation between the construction of centers and the process of institution building. Institution building in most spheres was seen as very relevant to the construction of centers and judged according to its contribution to the basic premises of these centers, while at the same time centers were also judged according to their capacity to promote such just and meaningful institutions. Second was the continuous competition between different groups or strata and elites about their access to the construction of these centers.

The combination of these orientations with the patterns of change that developed in Europe explain also the overall pattern of development of European civilization. As compared with the other great Christian civilizations - the Byzantine, later the Russian ones - "Western" Europe was distinguished by much less stability of regimes, by continuous changes of boundaries, regimes, and collectivities; but at the same time it evinced also a much greater degree of capacity of institutional innovation cutting across different political and "national" boundaries and centers, but at the same time continuously restructuring these centers.

It was from within this setting that the push to modernity developed in Europe - a push which was characterized by the restructuring of political centers, and of the conceptions of religious and cultural premises and by the concomitant development of capitalism. In the

development of all these aspects of modern European civilization, Protestantism constituted a very important solvent. Its potentialities as such a solvent were rooted first in some of its basic cultural orientations - above all, its great stress on the tension between the transcendental order and the social and political ones and on their mutual relevance; on the possibility - even necessity - to resolve this tension through this worldly activities and on the direct, unmediated access of individuals and communities, to the major attributes of the transcendental and the social order.

But these potentials of Protestantism could only become effective in the transformation of European civilization, first, insofar as Protestantism evinced all the characteristics of the European movements of heterodoxy and rebellion - the closed relations between secondary elites and broader strata and the combination of orientations to the restructuring of centers together with a very strong emphasis on institution building, and on the continuous interrelation between these two.

Second, these transformative potentials of Protestantism tended to develop, above all, in settings in which some of the major aspects of structural pluralism were most developed. It was in such settings as England, Holland, Switzerland, to a smaller degree in the Scandinavian countries, and initially also in France that the solvent created by Protestantism was crucial in transforming the European society in

line with its basic cultural and institutional characteristics, but going beyond the concrete way in which they crystallized in the more traditional (medieval) settings.

In the formation of centers the most important aspect of such transformation was, first, the incorporation of orientations of protest and of heterodoxy, as they developed in the Reformation into central symbols of society, thus creating the special revolutionary premises of modernity; and, second, the restructuring of basic cultural premises of European society in the direction of "secular" cultural traditions. In the sphere of institution building Protestantism intensified the motivational commitments to economic, scientific, and political activities and to the sanctification and legitimation of such institution building in terms of the basic premises of the system, often seeing them as directly representing them.

It was out of the developments briefly analyzed above that some of the major characteristics as well as problematics of the further development of European civilization and modernity crystallized.

The central initial focus or premise of European modernity has been, as has so often been stressed in the literature, that the exploration of continuously expanding human and natural environments and destiny and their directions, and even mastery, can be attained by the conscious effort of man and society. Its central premise was the

possibility of active formation of crucial aspects of social, cultural, and natural orders by conscious human activity and participation. The fullest expressions of this attitude could be found in the breakthrough of science and of the scientific approach into the parameters of the cultural order; that is, in the premises that the exploration of nature by man is an "open" enterprise which creates a new cultural order and that the continuous expansion of scientific and technological knowledge could transform both the cultural and social orders and create new, external and internal environments endlessly explored by man - and at the same time harnessed to his social, cultural, intellectual vision and technical needs.

Accordingly, there developed in modern Europe attempts at the formation of a "rational" culture, efficient economy, civil (class) society, and nation-state within all of which the tendencies of rational expansion of all aspects of cultural and social life could become fully articulated. These attempts were based on several assumptions which can be seen as the transformation, in modern settings, of the basic orientations and problematics of European tradition.

## VI

It was indeed against the background of these symbolic and structural characteristics of European civilization that there tended to develop the specific conditions which facilitated its modern

transformation. This transformation was greatly facilitated by the specific structure and orientations of the more influential Protestant groups - especially by the fact that they were secondary, mostly non-political elites, which combined a strong orientation to political center with autonomous access to it, as well as their specific religious-transcendental orientations. These characteristics have been decisive in enabling them to develop - after the failure of their initial totalistic efforts to establish a new religious society - in the this-worldly direction which could also influence the broader trends of change of European modernity and of the combination of these codes, orientations and structural characteristics of European society on the one hand and the transformative potentials of the various religious (Protestant) groups on the other. There developed, in many parts of Europe, a high degree of congruence between the cultural and the political identities of territorial population; two, a high level of symbolic and effective commitment to political and cultural centers, including a close relation between these centers and the more primordial dimensions of human existence; and, three, a marked emphasis on common political, defined collective goals for all members of the national community.

It was out of these assumptions that some of the specific propositions about patterns of participation and protest of the nation-state

and the close relations between the nation-state and class-society developed. The most important of these assumptions were:

- that both political groups and more autonomous social forces and elites crystallize in relatively antithetic, autonomous yet complementary "units" or "forces" of "State" and "Society";
- that those continuously struggle to gain ascendancy at the cultural and political center of the nation-state and the regulation of access to it; that the various processes of structural change and as a result of processes of modernization - gave rise, not only to various concrete problems and demands, but also to a growing quest for participation in the broader social and political order; and
- that this quest for participation of the periphery in such social, political and cultural orders is mostly manifest in the search for access to these centers.

## VII

While these characteristics were common to all European societies yet there developed among them also a very great variability. This variability in different European societies in the two historical periods indicates not only changes and differences in the tempo of industrialization in the extension of political rights and in the formation of political unites, but also in the basic institutional features of the institutional formats

specific to the European experiences. The most important differences are in the definition of the political community and its relation to national, religious and regional countries; in the structure of power and of access to it; in the forms and expressions of class conflict; in the definition of meaning of specifically modern institutions.

Among the most important aspects of such variability is that in the relations between the formation of the nation-state and of class-societies. These two have been very often analyzed as if they were concretely and analytically two distinct movements. But in fact they are very closely related and interrelated - and the specific mode of structuring of social hierarchies - which has been designated as modern class-consciousness and movements - can be understood, as we have indicated above, only through their interrelations with the processes of formation of nation-states and their centers as they developed in the peculiar European or Western fashion.

Hence also the differences in the working out of such relations in different European countries can be attributed to different constellations of the following major factors: different cultural orientations and emphases within the common framework of the European heritage; the structure of the major cultural, political and social elite groups; the different political-ecological constellations in the framework of the emerging multiple international systems.



## VIII

We shall illustrate this point by going beyond Europe, not to non-Western societies, but to one of the major "offshoots" of Europe - the United States, and by coming back to the question asked by Werner Sombart in the beginning of this century why is there no socialism in America. The answer Sombart gave to his question was, as is well known, that there is no socialism in America basically because it is a very mobile open society, frontier society. But Sombart's answer cannot explain very well why there was a very interesting, even if not a European type of socialist movement in Argentina, a country in which the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century there was no less mobility than in the U.S. Even stronger is the paradox with respect to Australia which is also a continental nation and which is yet a country with a very strong socialist tradition. For these reasons also Louis Hartz's explanation of the lack of a liberal and socialist tradition in the U.S. as due to its never being a feudal society is, at best only partially true. It is, of course, true that the egalitarian movements develop more fully against the background of a hierarchical society. But what is of crucial importance for our analysis is that this background has been relevant in the U.S., not only with respect to class-relation, but also with respect to the very formation of its political collective identity,

of its statehood, of the specific type of nation-state that developed in America. In Europe the processes of building nation-states and of structuring of social hierarchies were continuously combined against its hierarchical-pluralistic background. Here the crucial fact with respect to the United States has been the common political framework and common identity of the American people, based on any historical experience with a hierarchical and primordial background in the sense in which it has been the case in many European countries. U. S. is a civilization which was based on a political transformation of a religious experience - a unique thing in the history of mankind. The Founding Fathers - those giants to which he was referring to before - were the carriers of a very interesting process of transformation which created a new civilization. Among the special features of this civilization I could like to emphasize two. One is the emergence of what Robert Bellah has called the civil religion in America. It was a civilization which developed a civil religion and whose common identity was focused around that civil religion. And I want to emphasize both words - both civil and religion - without the two being necessarily a contradiction. It is this combination that is a very important clue to understanding the unique aspects of American experience.

The second feature of this civilization is, as Tocqueville has emphasized, in the idea and ideology of equality. It was the first modern society whose collective identity was not related and was not termed in any hierarchical terms; in which the problems of the hierarchical orders of the society were not related to the problems of the constitution of the body polity - just as it was not related to a common historical origin, to common historical memory, mythical or actual. I think this unique combination of civil regime and of a strong emphasis on equality gives the full answer to Sombart's question, and helps us to put the American experience in the framework of a comparative analysis of Western societies - a framework which could - and should - be extended to the analysis of different European societies.