

# Eisenstadt, Brazil and the multiple modernities framework: Revisions and reconsiderations

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## Abstract

The notion of multiple modernities as developed by Eisenstadt has become increasingly influential in debates about modernity and the historical formation of societies in comparative perspective. On closer inspection, the theoretical framework is less than straightforward when it comes to specific applications. This article considers Brazil from the perspective of a revised theory of multiple modernities. There has been virtually no application to specific case studies within the countries of the South. Brazil could be considered an important case study of modernity that deserves attention in its own right. The article shows that the theoretical framework of multiple modernities offers insights into the Brazilian trajectory of modernity, a consideration of which also challenges some of the assumptions of Eisenstadt's approach. Despite the limits of the framework, the notion of multiple modernities offers a good basis for a global analysis of modernity. Greater attention needs to be given to civilizational encounters and to sources of conflict and plurality within modernity and which cannot be accounted for in terms of the principles of axiality postulated by Eisenstadt.

## Keywords

Brazil, civilizational analysis, Latin America, multiple modernities, S.N. Eisenstadt

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## Introduction

The concept of modernity in social science today has been hugely influenced by the work of S.N. Eisenstadt. It is impossible to consider modernity in any context without taking into account its multiple nature and the signal work of Eisenstadt. Of the many challenges to the classical theories of modernization with their Eurocentric assumptions, the theory of multiple modernities is one of the most significant since it allows for the possibility of modernities other than western ones.<sup>1</sup> In this article, we argue that with some corrections, a multiple modernities approach is one of the most fruitful frameworks for the analysis of modernity. However, because of the weight given to long-run historical continuity and Axial Age presuppositions, the theory as originally formulated by Eisenstadt cannot be so easily applied to some societies, such as Brazil, where the singularity of its modernity had a later origin and one more influenced by inter-civilizational encounters, which we argue had a greater influence than the Axial Age presuppositions and reflected a different logic.

Much of the discussion around multiple modernities has concentrated on the northern hemisphere and in particular on Asia. Eisenstadt's particular focus, writing in the Weberian tradition of comparative sociology, has been on those models of modernity that developed from the Eurasian Axial Age civilizations, including China (Sachsonmaier et al., 2002). A topic relatively neglected in the multiple modernities literature has been Latin America, which has been the focus of only a single volume (Roniger and Waisman, 2002). This volume, which included an important contribution by Eisenstadt,<sup>2</sup> considered Latin America in the context of a wider analysis of the Americas.<sup>3</sup> A specific consideration of Latin America from a multiple modernities framework has yet to be undertaken and, for reasons that will be given in this article, some major modifications will be required of the classical approach of Eisenstadt.

It may indeed be the case that such large-scale geopolitical units such as entire continents are too large for any useful conclusions to be drawn especially concerning the present. Yet, the 'controversial' notion of Latin America (Feres, 2005; Mignolo, 2005) is a political category that has continued relevance for those societies that form part of its world (Centeno, 2002). In this respect, the notion of Latin American is different from the idea of Asia, which was a European invention that does not, for instance, mean much to the Chinese or Japanese. However, the concern of this article is with Brazil, which we argue represents a particularly interesting case study for a theory of modernity in general and, too, for a consideration of Latin America of which it is an integral part. Brazil is also a country that in many ways is a challenge for the multiple modernities approach, which would appear to presuppose the historical experiences of the imperial centres of power that came in the wake of the Axial Age civilizations. In sum, the aim of the article is to demonstrate the relevance of a revised version of Eisenstadt's multiple modernities framework taking Brazil as an example.

The first section of the article sums up the main aspects of Eisenstadt's framework. The second section highlights some problems with Eisenstadt's approach and, drawing on the work of others, such as Johann Arnason and Peter Wagner, suggests how the notion of modernity needs to be reconsidered. The work of two important Brazilian social scientists, Gilberto Freyre and Darcy Ribeiro, also offers insights into the Brazilian case and can be seen as complementing Eisenstadt's arguments. The third section considers the case of Brazil in light of a revised theory of modernity and makes the argument

that the specificity of Brazilian modernity is due less to its Axial Age presuppositions inherited from Europe than from the encounter of African, European and pre-Columbian cultures over several centuries. However, the major and defining developments occurred in the nineteenth century and consolidated in the twentieth century.

## **Eisenstadt and the multiple modernities framework**

In recent decades, the concept of modernity has become influential in theorizing on Latin America. Much of this is inspired by Eisenstadt's path-breaking work,<sup>4</sup> though most of the literature draws from a more general notion of modernity in comparative perspective.<sup>5</sup> The multiple modernities framework has one major advantage over traditional modernization approaches: it is anti-evolutionary and yet offers a way to analyse long-term trends within a broadly critical framework, though the critical dimension has not been brought out by Eisenstadt (and we argue requires a more cosmopolitan perspective to do so). It is also anti-teleological and instead of postulating a universal model of modernity, Eisenstadt insists, especially in his much later work following his engagement with Arnason, on the existence of a plurality of modernities. The pluralizing tendencies within modernity derive from the essential creativity that lies at the heart of their cultural programmes and gives them different degrees of reflexivity.<sup>6</sup>

It is this emphasis on plurality, creativity and reflexivity that makes the approach particularly relevant to the analysis of societies whose historical experience has been different from the western model. It makes the approach even more important considering that it became popular after a time when historical analysis was weak in sociological interpretations (Bendix, 1964; Moore, 1958). So from a multiple modernities perspective, Latin America should be considered not in terms of a model of modernity defined by westernization or as a radical departure from the West along the lines of a model of exceptionalism, but rather in terms of distinctive kinds of creativity and reflexivity that follow from the constant assertion of human autonomy, which Wagner (2012) argues defines the central dynamic of modernity. This would suggest – in the most favourable reading of Eisenstadt's work – a greater emphasis on heterogeneity, multi-centricity and endogenous development, and how distinctive modes of interpretation emerged in response to key challenges and interpretations of how human autonomy is to be realized. Moreover, Eisenstadt stresses the openness and uncertainty of modernity due to essentially the creativity of society and the recognition that everything can be contested.

According to Eisenstadt – to sum up briefly the main tenets of his theoretical framework – the contemporary world is best understood as a product of various kinds of, what he has called, 'cultural programmes' that constitute the fundamental structures out of which the various forms of modernity emerged. These cultural programmes acquired their basic orientation in the period he refers to, following Karl Jaspers, as the Axial Age, that is, from c. 800 to 200 BCE, but were continuously re-created due to a diversity of interpretations of their cultural content. This puts at the heart of the civilizations of the world an open-ended dynamic.

There were two ruptures or discontinuities that made possible the current variety of modernities: the Axial Age breakthroughs – different cultural versions of a basic common problematic – and modernity proper, which for Eisenstadt ultimately constitutes a new civilization. At the core of the Axial Age breakthroughs was a 'cultural programme'

that was formed around a tension between the mundane order and the transcendental order, which the cultural programme seeks to bridge. This is what also guarantees continuity in history: it is a continuity that was born of rupture, for while the resolutions were always different, the basic problem remained constant. For Eisenstadt, all Axial civilizations are animated by this basic 'antinomy' between the vision of a higher order and the organization of the mundane world. This proposition is the basis of his framework, which requires such a claim to ensure that continuity does not entirely fade into continuous change. The antinomy is reflected in a basic tension between culture and institutional or societal structures. Elites are the carriers of different ideological visions of how societies should be organized and they challenge the prevailing order in light of new interpretations. However, a feature of the post-Axial Age civilizations is that they were never able to create a homogenous synthesis of the mundane order and the transcendental order due to the different interpretations of how it should be bridged.

Modernity is thus shaped by a civilizational background that gives to societies a distinctive cultural and political character. Yet modernity is not reducible to civilizational backgrounds. Modernity emerged out of the project of one civilization, the Christian European one, and manifested itself first in various heterodoxies, which all sought to bring the kingdom of God closer to the mundane world. These heterodoxies led to revolutions that sought to bridge the gap between the transcendental and the mundane orders. The underlying impulse in the Christian European civilization is that human agency can realize transcendental ideas, such as God's plan. These revolutions that it gave rise to from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries eventually became institutionalized and paved the way for a Second Axial Age – the emergence of modernity – and thus ceased to be marginal sectarian sects. This all began in Europe but spread to the Americas where the legacy of the Axial Age now transformed into the civilization of modernity was taken up by new groups and institutionalized in different ways. This legacy is modernity. However, modernity is not able to overcome the basic antinomy of the Axial Age, but continuously plays out the tension between pluralizing and totalizing conceptions of social order in different scenarios. For this reason, modernity did not give rise to a homogeneous civilization, but crystallized in different forms. Eisenstadt asserts that while European modernity was not the only one, it was the dominant reference point for all other routes to modernity, which produced in different ways and to different degrees hybrid versions.

Clearly, this approach, which is influenced by Weber, places a strong emphasis on the religious roots of civilizational orders, which give rise to ontological visions or world interpretations, but it goes beyond a reductive understanding of culture in drawing attention to interpretative capacities. In Weber, the driving force was a basic rationalism, which he found to be more embedded in western Christianity, especially in its Protestant form, and ultimately residing in its concern with salvation. For Eisenstadt, the driving force of the diversity of civilizations and the routes to modernity is a result of different solutions and different interpretations of the relation between the mundane and the transcendental orders. Modernity thus bears this imprint of a civilizational dynamic. Two key concepts, then, are the notions of a 'cultural programme' and the resulting 'crystallization' of a civilizational order and the later crystallization of modernity as a new kind of civilization, albeit one that emanated from one civilization. The notion of a cultural programme – which does not signify a homogenous cultural order – is perhaps best understood, as Arnason (2006a) has argued, less

as a predetermined script or set of codes than as a 'cultural problematic' in that it refers to different interpretations of the transcendental/mundane divide (p. 232). At a particular historical point, the crystallization of a civilization occurs and this in turn eventually establishes the basis of a variant of modernity. However, modernity is essentially global and derives from Europe and North America in its major reference points, but in spreading across the world – in the second major rupture in human history – it becomes intermeshed with civilizational forms giving to it a varied form. Obviously, one of the main ways in which it spreads was through colonization and more generally through westernization. A difficulty – to which we return below – when it comes to Latin America is that the Iberian colonization that brought the first wave of westernization was pre-modern, unlike nineteenth-century European colonialism in Africa and Asia.

So, there are two dimensions to historical plurality: first, the plurality of civilizations that in responding to modernity produce different variants and, second, the plurality of modernity in terms of different resolutions of the tension within it as one deriving from the Axial age problematic. Both of these have been the focus of two attempts to take up and develop in a new key Eisenstadt's theory of modernity. These will now be considered with a view to a revised theory of multiple modernity.

## **Beyond Eisenstadt: New conceptions of modernity**

The limits of Eisenstadt's approach have been discussed by Johann Arnason and Peter Wagner, who both adopt a critique inspired by Castoriadis. In the case of the former, there is a basic adherence to the civilizational analysis approach, while for the latter, this is more or less jettisoned in favour of a global sociology. For Arnason, civilizations are based on imaginaries or forms of 'world articulation', which are essentially shared cultural presuppositions or systems of meaning that endure in time and define families of societies that are larger than nations (Arnason, 2003, 2006a). Unlike Eisenstadt, the imaginary core of civilization is not fixed by the Axial Age and nor is it defined in terms of a basic religious orientation. Moreover, the imaginary significations are open to revision and re-interpretations to an extent far beyond what is allowed in Eisenstadt's framework. The plurality of civilizations is a reflection of the diversity of these different interpretative systems.

Arnason's approach is interpretative and phenomenological in contrast to the more Weberian nature of Eisenstadt's approach, which tends to see civilizations as based on more fixed reference points and reach a point of 'crystallization'. As pointed out above, Eisenstadt may have moved beyond his Weberian presuppositions following his engagement with Arnason's version of civilizational theory. Contingency and plurality are thus brought into his civilizational analysis, especially in his later essays (including the above-mentioned paper on Latin America). In addition, Arnason does not see modernity as a new kind of civilization, but rather sees it as shaped by different civilizations. In this sense, he places greater emphasis on civilizations and their inter-relations than Eisenstadt, who gave relatively little attention to civilizational interaction (Arnason, 2006b; Smith, 2009). The explanatory core of Eisenstadt's approach rested on the principle of axiality rather than on a theory of encounters. However, Arnason's position is substantially different in that, following Benjamin Nelson (1976, 1981), he strongly emphasizes civilizational encounters, thus correcting a

major limitation in Eisenstadt's approach. This is particularly pertinent, as we argue below, in the case of Brazil, where the intercultural encounter of civilizations is the only way to make sense of its historical formation.

In this view, then, a civilization did not crystallize as such, but was continuously shaped as a result of the interaction of cultures over several centuries. This is by no means incompatible with Eisenstadt's approach, but goes beyond his Weberian presuppositions in a strong as opposed to a weak conception of civilizational encounters. Some societies can be seen as receptive to cultural encounters more than others. For instance, it can be suggested that the cultural specificity of Brazil was an enduring mixing of the cultures of the world – African, Native American and European – and thus a contrast, to take a different example, to Japan.

In order to arrive at a more robust theory of multiple modernities, Peter Wagner abandons civilizational analysis altogether while adhering to Arnason's interpretive approach and the Castoriadian notion of imaginary significations that can be conceived in terms of central 'problématiques' (Wagner, 2009a, 2009b, 2012). For Wagner, a singular definition of modernity is required before seeking its multiple forms, and this consists of less a cultural programme than key questions or 'problématiques' that all modern societies seek to answer. In his view, the self-understanding of modern societies has not been constant but has undergone change, and modernity consequently is an on-going process of interpretations in light of experiences made earlier. He highlights three such interpretative questions: what kind of shared knowledge a society rests on, how to create rules for a common social life and how to establish the rules to solve the basic material needs of society. This approach thus seeks to give equal weight to the epistemic, the political and the economic problématiques (Wagner, 2012). What is finally common to all trajectories of modernity is also what defines the specificity of their different 'societal self-understandings': all societies need to find answers to these problématiques in their own ways. The fact that these problématiques are open to interpretations means that different answers will be found, and thus, there will be a plurality of modernities. To show what kind of answers can be found to these questions is ultimately a more fruitful approach to the analysis of modernity than a civilizational approach that tries to discover historical paths, as in the case of Eisenstadt, that derive from the Axial Age rupture. Wagner's intention is to develop a world sociology based on the analysis of different forms of societal self-understandings, and for this a theory of trajectories of modernity does not need a theory of civilizations because of the limitations that he identifies (Wagner 2011). One of his essential contributions is to highlight the importance of an interpretative perspective: modernity entails the proliferation of interpretations that derive not from a dominant philosophy, but from the plurality of interpretations people make of their experiences in very specific contexts. This suggests less multiple modernities, since the underlying commonality remains unclear, than a variety of trajectories of modernity (see Schmidt, 2006).

Despite the revisions that Arnason and Wagner have brought to the notion of multiple modernity, some questions remain. Wagner's interpretative approach could be advanced through greater attention to the nature of the learning mechanisms by which societal self-understanding arises from claims-making in civil society and also in the elites. From a cosmopolitan point of view, a more normative and critical edge can be incorporated into the analysis of different forms of modernity. Second, his approach could emphasize the interactive or the relational dimension in terms of the encounter of cultures, for instance,

through global communications and movements, or different forms of modernity, an aspect present in Arnason's approach that he does not take up. Finally, the interpretive approach would appear to neglect the explanatory level in terms of an analysis of long-term societal trends especially in relation to state and society relations. The dangers of path-dependency and over-generalized notions of historical continuity do not require the rejection of long-term analysis. These are broad suggestions for further work on varieties of modernities. Particularly pertinent in the case of Brazil, we wish to suggest, is the advantage to work also with a cosmopolitan interpretation of contemporary Brazil.

The interactive dimension of civilizational encounters, which Arnason has highlighted, would appear to offer a basis for a critical theory of modernity. It is through interaction in a global context that modernity takes shape. An interactionist account of the rise of modernity stresses the dynamics and modes of interaction whereby different parts of the world become linked through the expansion and diffusion of systems of exchange, networks of communication, cultural translations, and various forms of cosmopolitan third culture. The normative implication arising out of a conception of modernity as a condition of global interaction points in the direction of cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2009, 2011, Delanty and He 2008). While Arnason does not see any link between civilizational analysis and cosmopolitanism, it would appear to be an unavoidable conclusion of an account of civilizational encounters and a way to link it with the present. Cosmopolitanism, understood as a condition in which one culture undergoes transformation in light of the encounter with another culture, can be most vividly illustrated with respect to civilizational encounters. This can take different forms, ranging from cultural tolerance and understanding to major reorientations in self-understanding in light of global principles or re-evaluations of cultural heritage and identity as a result of intercultural communication. Cosmopolitanism concerns the broadening of horizons when one culture meets another or when one point of view is forced to re-evaluate its claims in light of the perspective of another (Delanty, 2009).

There are three aspects of modernity that need to be taken into account in a historically grounded sociological analysis that is open to cosmopolitan outcomes: (1) the endogenous developmental level in terms of the transformation in the moral and cognitive content of cultural models or 'social imaginaries' arising from claims-making in civil society, (2) the relational level of the encounter of societies through global communications and movements and with this the global expansion of modernity, and (3) the explanatory level in terms of an analysis of long-term trends especially in relation to state and society relations. This threefold approach defines the empirical reference point of modernity and suggests a view of modernity as variable without jettisoning its fundamentally singular nature as a field of tensions between the struggle for autonomy and mastery, to use Wagner's (1994) term. The first two levels – the developmental and relational – are particularly relevant in the present context and draw attention to cosmopolitan currents within modernity, for we see cosmopolitanism as a condition that arises when one culture encounters another producing a normative shift in its self-understanding. Cosmopolitanism thus understood is related to the capacity for learning, which can be understood as a broadening of horizons resulting from cultural encounters. We argue that this is particularly salient with respect to Brazil and a possible focus for research that is broadly within the framework of multiple

modernities. However, this goes beyond Eisenstadt's framework in that it affirms the significance of civilizational encounters as having a more primary role than Eisenstadt allowed. As the Brazilian Sociologist – often referred to as the Max Weber of Brazilian sociology – Gilberto Freyre argued in 1936, modern Brazil is a product of the encounter and mixing of African, European and pre-Columbian America cultures (see Freyre, 1963 [1936]; see also Burke and Pallares-Burke, 2008). While we are sceptical of some of the claims made by Freyre, such as the view that cultural hybridization led to the formation of a 'racial democracy', the argument is relevant to an understanding of the Brazilian variant of modernity and one that apparently challenges the determining power of the Axial Age problematic, a thesis that is best abandoned.<sup>7</sup>

In looking at Brazil from a multiple modernities perspective, we are not advocating anything like Brazilian exceptionalism – indeed the multiple modernities approach rejects such a position – but rather attempting to situate the country within a framework of comparative analysis and in a way that can tell us something about the present day. A drawback of Eisenstadt's framework is that it has relatively little to say about the current situation, which cannot be seen in terms only of a continuous re-interpretation of the Axial Age problematic. It is also important for a theory of modernity to be able to say something more about the present day beyond the recognition that we live in modern societies or, at least, to be able to encompass in a framework both perspectives, from the past to the present situation and also from the present situation to the past.

The relevance of Brazil can be arguably demonstrated historically in terms of different historical experiences from those of Hispanic America, for instance the difference in the patterns of Iberian colonization between the Spanish and Portuguese, the fundamentally different relation with the imperial centres, the fact that the capital of the Portuguese empire had been located in Brazil for a time, different entries to independence, and different patterns of state formation. Such an approach would also involve a consideration of the different pre-Iberian civilizations and the relation to the subsequent settler societies. Looking at the achievements of earlier times<sup>8</sup> can lead to important insights, but there is always the danger of explaining the present by necessity. Since, as Eisenstadt recognized, the present is not the product of necessity but of contingency, the historical model of modernity that developed in Brazil is best appreciated from the perspective of a theory that begins from the present situation rather than one that commences with certain assumptions about a model of modernity that allegedly crystallized in the early colonial period. In this article, we put forward the thesis that the significant moment was much later than the colonial period – the latter three decades of the nineteenth century being decisive – and that the social and political transformation of Brazil in the present day draws attention to the importance of global interconnections for a fuller understanding of modernity. This approach suggests the need to take the theory of multiple modernity beyond the limits of a civilizational analysis to a more world-oriented analysis, as Peter Wagner has argued. A fruitful avenue of inquiry would also be to identify cosmopolitan currents. However, more important is the question – to be addressed later – whether the developments of the nineteenth and twentieth century amount to a new breakthrough comparable to the two axial moments that Eisenstadt emphasized as decisive in the making of modernity.

A consideration of the multiple modernity approach with respect to Brazil presents a number of insights as well as challenges. Eisenstadt, as noted above, has himself given



little consideration to Latin America, and there has been only one publication on the Americas as a whole from a multiple modernities perspective (Roniger and Waisman, 2002). The limited literature does not consider other work written by Latin American theorists on civilizational formation in Latin America, for instance, the series of studies, titled 'Anthropology of Civilizations', which the Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro wrote in the 1960 and 1970s. Ribeiro's five books concerned how the different 'cultural matrixes' found in different parts of the world have strongly influenced the contemporary path. He explained, for instance, the patterns of social inequality between different countries in America as the whole continent in terms of their civilizational formation. In *The Americas and Civilization* (Ribeiro, 1971), he claims that it is possible to identify three different contemporary social configurations in Latin America, but not only there, derived from the cultural matrixes founded in the subcontinent: the 'new people', the 'testimonials' and the 'transplanted'. What defines each one of those configurations are the ways in which different cultural matrixes were assimilated for the formation of the societies that we find in the contemporary world. Despite the weight given to the concept of modernization in the region from 1960s to 1980s which could also be seen in his work, in this book, which has some volumes in the series dedicated particularly to Brazil, it is possible to find a way to link what could be termed 'cultural programmes' and the models of modernity developed in all the Americas.

### **Brazil in light of the multiple modernities framework**

Brazil represents an interesting example of a major Latin American country that can be considered as exhibiting a distinctive trajectory of modernity and a variant of western civilization. As with many Latin American societies, it was a society that was created as a 'new society' and where the subsequent diffusion of modernity was particularly pronounced. In the terms of Eisenstadt, there are clear examples of how different elites – conservative, liberals, republicans, later Marxists and social democrats – pursued different visions of how society should be organized, though it is difficult to reduce these visions to the mundane and transcendental orders problematic. It has often been noted that Latin American identity is elusive since its constitutive terms derive from outside itself or refer to external realities (Larrain, 2000: 143). It is possible to argue, for instance, that the collective identity of the First Republic, which became known as the 'Old Republic' (1889–1930), was thoroughly modernist in its commitment to the positivist slogan, 'Order and Progress', the motto of the Brazilian national flag. In this instance, the institutional order reflected the ideological vision of modernity as 'progress' – which could only be achieved through science – while the assertion of 'order' referred to the role of coordination that the State should accomplish and ensure that progress did not undermine the established social and political order (Carvalho, 1990; Paim, 1981).

The dimension of newness and the embracing of modernity is central to the Brazilian case. Eisenstadt has commented that Latin America in general was not just a local variation of the European model, but a major departure from it. While the established view was, as articulated by Louis Hartz (1964), that the new settler societies were "“fragments” of Europe", Eisenstadt (2002b) would see them as the first crystallization of a new civilization since the Axial Age (p. 9). To term the foundation of American societies as a new civilization

is probably too general, given the differences between North and South and due to the differences within Latin America (between Central and South America). Greater differentiation is needed in speaking not only of the Americas, but too of Latin America (a point that Eisenstadt [2002b: 19] has himself emphasized). In the case of Brazil, for instance, the colonial pattern was different from the one that developed in the Spanish territories. The pattern of Portuguese conquest, on the one side, emphasized greater autonomy to the settler elites – since unlike the state-led Spanish colonization, the Portuguese crown did not have the resources or inclination for outright colonization as its interests lay in India – and, on the other, it led to greater adherence by those colonial elites to the imperial centre in Lisbon. While the Portuguese crown later used direct rule as opposed to the Spanish vice-royalty system, the nature of the stronger imperial rule was greater accommodation with local elites through patronage. The Portuguese crown itself had been based in Rio de Janeiro after 1808, when Portugal had been occupied by France, leading to the legacy of Brazil as the centre of the Portuguese empire. The allure of empire remained. So, when independence was achieved in 1822, the new state declared itself an empire, with the son, Dom Pedro, of the Portuguese monarch John VI as emperor. Brazil is unique in embracing as its monarch a member of the ruling family country it was rebelling against (Skidmore, 1999: 37). It is arguably the case, then, that the Brazilian elites used the imperial theme to further their aspirations, and since at least 1822, the new state achieved a degree of autonomy from the Old World and was gradually to surpass the colonizer country in importance. The fact that the state remained relatively intact after the revolutionary period that saw the collapse of the Spanish crown and the consequent break-up of its Latin American territories into new independent states was a paradox: it meant that national identity was relatively undeveloped in colonial Brazil and its later emergence occurred after the relatively peaceful declaration of the Empire of Brazil in 1822. The pro-monarchy Luso-Portuguese elites would have preferred to maintain the link with Portugal through an alternating seat of government between Rio and Lisbon. The rejection of these proposals by the Portuguese liberal government, which had introduced constitutional monarchy, for co-government led to independence (Williamson, 2009: 229–30). These developments and the fact of long-term stability of a patrimonial state do not amount to a new civilization, but certainly could be seen in Eisenstadt's terms as a significant historical variant of modernity within the Americas, even if the key developments occurred later.

The tension between, on the one side, a 'pre-modern colonial society' and a 'modern society' defined in part by European culture shaped the advent of modernity in Brazil as it did in the rest of Latin America. In Brazil, the modernist zeal triumphed in the end over the original civilizational commitment to the imperial country. France – and increasingly too Britain – became more important than Portugal for defining the modern collective identity of the country in the latter two decades of the nineteenth century when the Empire of Brazil was abolished and replaced by the modernist republic in 1889. The delayed entry of republicanism made possible a greater concern with modernity in both culture and politics. Paris was the major attraction and inspiration for the Old Republic (Carvalho, 1990). According to Laurence Whitehead (2002), even the relatively conservative forces within Brazil had a 'bias towards the modern' (p. 35). This is because Latin America from the beginning emerged either in reaction or in response to the Enlightenment and its elites were constantly forced to define themselves in its terms. This was in part necessity due to the importance of the international market for Brazil with its export-led mono-agricultural economy. Thus, we

find a peculiar mixture of the acceptance of slavery – Brazil being the last country to abolish it – and the political ideologies of liberalism, both moral and political, and republicanism. These in turn collided with the patrimonial state and its neo-Thomist concept (Morse, 1982) of the state as an organic entity, though this became increasingly challenged by positivism, republicanism and liberalism. As Avritzer (2002) shows, despite the extreme hostility to public space during the colonial period, with the ‘Abolitionism’ movement during the second half of the nineteenth century, we can see clear signs of the formation of a public sphere in which political contestation can occur (p. 148). These different orientations do not constitute a civilization as such, but modernity formed out of conflicting and ever-changing values. The nature of Brazil – its size, distance from Europe, sparse population, the absence of explicit class conflict due to the survival of a slave-based pre-capitalism – allowed the elites to adopt very selectively ideas and influences from outside. The nationalism of the New Republic, initiated in 1930, is an instance of how the modernist drive occurred as a state project. There was nothing preordained in this. It was not the outcome of an inexorable civilizational process, but the pragmatic outcome of alliances among the elites: army reformers who had embraced positivism, the Republican Party, capitalists and landowners as well as working-class radicalism (Cardoso, 2010).

The early reception of positivism is undoubtedly one of the best examples of the transformations of a European idea that was quickly discarded in France and more or less ignored in Germany and Britain. The positivist cult, embraced in Brazil in a manner quite unlike in France, can be seen as the crystallization of a way to understand modernity in a society whose relatively late national identity was forged as a state-led project, albeit one that did not seek to undermine hierarchical social relations. In addition to positivism, there was the appeal of the theory of evolution and social evolutionism, as espoused by Herbert Spencer. The latter was influential in the late nineteenth-century Brazil in the interrelationship of science, industry and progress and in the shaping of the modern ideal of Brazilian national identity (Bradford Burns, 1993: 166; Williamson, 2009: 298–300). The idea of Brazil as a nation which could encompass a fragmented society in a huge country – more than half the size of the Latin American continent – was one of the first challenges for the republican government to address (Cardoso, 2010). Both evolutionism and positivism were compatible in pointing the way to a modern ‘Republic of Progress’ based on authoritarian rule by a self-appointed elite but, too, were a way for Brazil to make the transition to modernity (see Oliven, 2000). The choice of the Brazilian flag with the emblem of Order and Progress was the outcome of a competition and the final choice was one of three models to mark the national identity of the newly established republic. There is no other example of a country – except perhaps the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) – that has inscribed into its national identity an ideology of modernist programmatic planning. Modern Brazil, since the early nineteenth century, is also an example of one of the rather more direct legacies of Auguste Comte for modernity. Europe was indeed a cultural reference point, as Eisenstadt has affirmed, but European ideas were appropriated in ways that could be considered civilizational, as the example of positivism suggests.

From the perspective of Eisenstadt’s theoretical framework, there is clear evidence of a creative tension between institutional orders – the state and its institutions, the organization of the economy – and new cultural visions, ranging from those of the imperial theme, the

diverse understanding of what constitutes a republic, the positivistic use of science for state policy, and European cultural ideas. The very Comtean idea of progress should be seen in terms of an interpretative category as opposed to an objective reality to make possible a social and political order that reflected the aspiration of the dominant elites. The modern project in Brazil in ideological terms was mainly a fusion of republicanism, liberalism and positivism. But the democratic aspiration also represented another current that was often in tension with the ideals of the elites. On the one side, the emphasis on state planning, industrialization and the exaltation of the ruling elite and, on the other side, the moral ideas associated with liberalism and democracy produced a tension at the heart of the modern project that goes beyond the order versus progress slogan. Comtean positivism, as interpreted by progressive military elites, opened the prospect of a new national project that could divest itself of those elements of the past it did not like and a cautious embracing of the future, for Progress, the watchword of positivism, had to be reconciled to social order (Avritzer, 2002: 158). The confluence of this project with the foundation of the Republican Party in 1870 produced an outcome that defined a cultural model that shaped the unfolding of modernity in Brazil. It was during this period that we can identify some regional variants within the Brazilian Federal States and which are important in explaining the democratic achievements of the 20th century, or instance, the formation of stronger public and autonomous spheres in some federal states, such as Minas Gerais and São Paulo, and centralized and personalized governments, as in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador (Mota, 2010).

The spirit of a Brazilian modernization animated much of the major institutional projects of the state: industrialization and technological development, the foundation of Brasília in 1960, and earlier in the twentieth century the creation of Belo Horizonte, the assertion of a strong national identity, and an immigration policy of racial whitening. In addition to these moments of political modernity is the impact on cultural modernity of modernism and its Brazilian variant led by the 'modernist movement' centred in São Paulo (Resende, 2000). Laurence Whitehead (2002) remarks that Latin America – and the point is particularly pertinent to Brazil – is a 'social landscape littered with the results of successive drives to for modernity, each of which crystallized a tangible but incomplete result before being supplanted or cast adrift', leading to, what he has termed, a 'mausoleum of modernities' (p. 30). This is all in accordance with Eisenstadt's notion of modernity as a radical break with the past, akin to the earlier Axial Age rupture. However, it also challenges some of the presuppositions of his theoretical framework in that the result was a different kind of modernity than one that can be understood within a framework of binary cultural codes shaped by the mundane and the transcendental, beyond the rather obvious tension that exists between ideology – as programmes for major social and political change – and social reality. Brazil in part entered a western forged modernity, but it was one of its own making. The project of modernity in Brazil is not easily explained within the civilizational framework, since the development of modernity owes too much to other dynamics that had a later origin. However, in many ways, to follow Eisenstadt's general lines of argument, Brazilian political modernity is like every project of modernity, a piecemeal and contradictory project, shaped in this instance by positivism, liberalism and republicanism.

Eisenstadt's approach emphasizes the civilizational context and the Axial Age roots of societies. In the case of Brazil, as in many examples one could cite, this presents the difficulty that the period from the late nineteenth century was more decisive in shaping

modernity than the earlier colonial period, however, formative it may have been. In this period, there was a conscious attempt by Brazilian elites to establish a new kind of society, with its own public agenda and its own public sphere (Avritzer, 2002). In the terms of Eisenstadt's theory, it is not clear whether this is to be located within the civilizational path or in the arrival of modernity. He over-emphasized the tension between the transcendental order and a mundane order as the defining tenet of a civilization. Consequently, the theory underestimates the significance of other kinds of conflicts that do not derive from this central conflict or cultural programme. This is highly problematical when it comes to peasant and slave rebellions or such major rebellions, as is illustrated by the Canudos Rebellion in the North East of Brazil in 1896–1897 when over 30,000 people were massacred by the state. The absence of any consideration of slavery, slave revolts and the debate about abolition in the nineteenth century ultimately undermines the relevance of the theory for a society shaped by the experience of slavery, which can hardly be considered marginal.<sup>9</sup>

Slavery, which was not completely abolished in Brazil until as late as 1888, is arguably one of the defining features of the history of Brazil and its legacy has been an enduring feature of the society. The particular variant of Christianity that was taken up in Brazil provided a relatively strong cultural identity for the colonial elites in a hostile environment faced with the perpetual prospects of slave revolts. This identity was rarely questioned, and it is difficult to find evidence of creativity in the cultural programme of the colonial elites. A religious dispute that does not quite fit into this model is different Christian views on the morality of enslaving the native Americas, the Jesuits being opposed to the use of Native Americas as slaves. The Jesuit and the colonial projects were in fact opposed to each other, as Ribeiro (2000: 29) noted, confirming Eisenstadt's notion of a cultural programme defined in terms of controversies. However, on the whole, the hierarchal version of Catholicism that was adopted in Brazil prevailed without much opposition – not withstanding liberation theology – and it is difficult to find an example of the political mobilization of the Church until the 1980s when the Catholic Church became increasingly outspoken against the brutality of the military state. As has often been noted (e.g. Spohn, 2011) about his work, Eisenstadt over-states the cultural core of civilizations and thus tends to see civilizations as essentially cultural. Conflict is derived from different interpretations of basic cultural premises, thus failing to capture some of the most important kinds of conflict that do not derive from the Axial Age antecedents. However, examples of conflicts such as those opened up by the twentieth-century liberation theology of Leonardo Boff and Helder Camera can be seen within the terms of Eisenstadt's broad conception of the civilizational roots of modernity.

There is then some basis to the view that after all Eisenstadt is committed a path-dependent conception of history (Knöbl, 2010, 2011). The Axial Age provided, he claimed, the basic tenets for those civilizations that later developed and whose ontological visions survived until they were changed by a New Axial age emanating from Europe. The idea of a 'founding moment' located in the distant past continues to hold sway over societies trapped within civilizational logics. As argued in this article, such an approach entirely places the emphasis on a historical matrix which, however conceived, limits what can be said about the present configuration of the modern world. So despite the recognition of contingency, reflexivity and plurality in his work, the two axial moments

– 800–200 BCE and the seventeenth to nineteenth century – severely limit historical analysis. The period from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century saw major change – independence, the emergence of the Brazilian Empire and transition to Republic – and also the transformations of the twentieth century – the Getúlio Vargas New State and the Dictatorship which began in 1964 – do not fit into Eisenstadt's two axial moments. With regard to the emergence of modernity the allegedly multiple nature of cultural forms is limited to the playing out of a tension between a vision of political community as plural and a vision of political community as hierarchical. Furthermore, the notion of a 'Second Axial Age' in which modernity emerges as a new and tendentially global civilization overestimates the European dimension in that the cultural programme is defined in terms that are characteristically European. The tension between pluralist/egalitarian and hierarchical/homogenizing visions of political community is far too limiting an account of the central conflict within modernity not only as an account of the European historical experience but too especially for other world histories. The related suggestion that universalist versus particularist orientations – heterodox versus homogenizing doctrines – that define the Axial Age civilizations and modernity is also a further limiting aspect of the approach. For instance, the tension in Brazilian identity and culture could be seen as less between universalism and particularism than between universalism and a heterogeneous transculturalism pluralism (see Schelling, 2000).

It may indeed be the case that the major divisions in the world were within civilizations and not between them. Eisenstadt gives relatively little consideration of encounters between civilizations and underestimates internal pluralization (Smith, 2009). The result is a conception of civilizations as relatively isolated and shaped by their internal logics of development. While this should not be stated too strongly and not indicating something like a potential 'clash of civilizations', the tendency in his work has been to stress the plurality of civilizations and their internal unifying cultural programmes. In his essay on the Americas, there is a slight departure from this in the acknowledgement that the encounter between the Americas with Africa and Europe was significant (see Smith, 2010). In this context, he refers to the specificity of the 'Portuguese empire and the Caribbean plantation societies'; in addition, there was the encounter with the native Americans (Eisenstadt, 2002b: 13). However, this occupies a very marginal place in his analysis, as does all pre-Axial Age civilizations. For an understanding of Brazil in the present day, it would be necessary to conceive of the Brazilian trajectory of modernity to include developments that are not easily accommodated within Eisenstadt's framework, such as nineteenth- and twentieth-century popular culture with its distinctive Brazilian creations and its reception all around the western modern world.

## **Conclusion: Developing the problem in a broader perspective**

The concept of modernity needs to be considerably developed beyond the question of its multiple nature and the issue of the degree of westernization that may be entailed in it. In line with the arguments of Arnason (1991) and Wagner, as well as Habermas, modernity needs to be seen in some sense as a 'field of tensions' that is irreducible to one dimension, such as Eisenstadt's mundane versus transcendental tension.

Political modernity does not only involve statist ideologies such as positivism, but also entails norms of justice and normative conceptions of the individual and political community. Brazilian elites in the late nineteenth century were inspired by different ideas of modernity, ranging from liberalism to republican state-led projects, but the appropriation of such ideas varied. Ultimately, modernity is not western, but a set of orientations that are realized in different places in different ways and at different times. The abolitionist movement in Brazil is an example of the moral current within modernity challenging the legal justification of slavery and Brazilian exceptionalism (Avritzer, 2002: 153). It was significant in the creation of a public sphere of discussion critical of the prevailing order. As Avritzer (2002) has argued, 'some of modernity's elements might have transcultural validity' (p. 157). Such norms of publicity and critique should not be seen as western even if they had a greater impact on European societies or took root there first; rather, they are transcultural in the sense of being akin to regulative principles that form the basis of the cognitive and cultural models of all societies. Such norms allow societies to interpret themselves and develop identities and practices that provide them with a capacity for action. The ways in which they do this differ. This is not far from Wagner's notion of three 'problématiques', but suggests a wider cognitive process of developmental learning structures within the cultural models of modern societies.<sup>10</sup> This would require a greater emphasis on endogenous developmental logics as opposed to what Eisenstadt refers to as a civilizational cultural programme.

A revised multiple modernities approach would have to address more centrally the inter-civilizational dimension of the encounter of different cultures and the intermeshed nature of different models of modernity (see Therborn, 2003). While Freyre exaggerates the degree of cultural hybridization, the encounter of the European, African and native American was consequential in defining modern Brazil. According to Hawthorne (2010), due to the centrality of slavery to Brazil, for much of the early modern period, the Amazonia and Upper Ghana were two sides of the same coin. The slaves created new or re-created old cultures in the Americas. Brazil itself can be seen as a society that emerged out of the mixing of cultures from different parts of the world (Ribeiro, 2000). This intercultural dimension is part of the making of modernity, for modernity generates encounters between societies and the civilizations of the world are products, too, of the expansion of systems of communication (Seigel, 2009). In both historical and contemporary perspective, modernity is a product of global interconnectivity in that as societies become more and more linked, their cultural models undergo change leading to degrees of reflexivity, self-problematization and critique. Debates on global issues, such as environment, social justice, human rights, democracy and so on, form the basis of the cognitive content of the modes of interpretation that come with modernity.

Following from both of these proposals is a cosmopolitan direction to modernity: as societies are shaped through cultural encounters and become increasingly linked due to global connections, their cultural models become potentially cosmopolitan. Since the rise of modernity in Brazil and other countries of Latin America, cosmopolitan currents are evident (Mota, 2012), despite the absence of cosmopolitanism as a concept. However, as Salomon (1986) shows, cosmopolitanism as an intellectual idea was not developed clearly in the subcontinent. It is nonetheless the case that elements which are used to define the cosmopolitan approach have been present in some remarkable works. In *Prospero's Mirror*,

Richard Morse (1982)<sup>11</sup> argued that Latin America due to its unique cultural composition could have ‘a message for the modern world’. To be sure, Morse’s view was based on a view of Latin America that drew its inspiration from a pre-modern world, but it articulated a position that challenged the received view of the moral superiority of the Northern Hemisphere. The debate about Brazil as a racial democracy, developments with regard to collective rights, multiculturalism and so on could be also seen as expressions of cosmopolitan issues. An important consideration is that cultural encounters between Brazil and the wider world are not just one directional. Developments within Brazil have an impact on global debates, as best illustrated by the World Forum in Porto Alegre since 2001.

Finally, while we have departed significantly from the multiple modernities framework of Eisenstadt, we assert the importance of long-term historical analysis, but wish to avoid path-dependency explanations. In the case of Brazil, we have stressed the difficulty in making major claims about continuity in the civilizational background and have argued that modernity did not take the form of a single model, but many and the different orientations within it cannot be reduced to Eisenstadt’s dual conflict.

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### Notes

1. Examples include Gaonkar (2001), Kaya (2003), Schmidt (2006), and Taylor (1999). For a useful review of the literature, see Wagner (2009b).
2. A different version of his chapter appeared as a journal article (Eisenstadt, 2002a).
3. The southern regional variants are taken into account in a few chapters, but only one chapter has a focus specifically on Brazil, and it does not address the debate about multiple modernities (Avritzer, 2002). The arguably most far-reaching analysis of Latin American modernity in the volume (Whitehead, 2002) does not rely on the terms of Eisenstadt’s own proposals.
4. See Eisenstadt (2001, 2003) for some major statements of his approach.
5. See Domingues (2011), Larrain (2000), Roniger and Waisman (2002), Miller and Hart (2007), Schelling (2000), and Smith (2009, 2011).
6. This point has been made by Knöbl (2011: 15) who has questioned the degree to which Eisenstadt in fact abandoned a path-dependent conception of civilizations (see also 2012).
7. A problem more generally with Freyre is that he operated with very strong culturalist approach.
8. In *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss (2010 [1955]) saw in these prehistoric cultures that inhabited the vastness of Brazil’s Amazon basin the source of the ‘rainbow of human cultures’, ‘a vanished era when the human species was in proportion to the world it occupied, and when there was still a valid relationship between the enjoyment of freedom and the symbols denoting it’ (p. 150).
9. More than a one-third of all Africans shipped to the New World (60% in the nineteenth century) went to Brazil (Levine, 1999: 66).



10. See Strydom (2010).
11. Published in Spanish in 1982 and translated into Portuguese in 1988, it has not been translated into English. For a well-known and earlier statement of his position, see Morse (1964). See also Merquior (1991).

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