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## ARTICLES

# Global Modernity? Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism

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## Abstract

This article offers the concept of 'global modernity' (*in the singular*) as a way to understand the contemporary world. It suggests that the concept helps overcome the teleology implicit in a term such as globalization, while it also recognizes global difference and conflict, which are as much characteristics of the contemporary world as tendencies toward unity and homogenization. These differences, and the appearance of 'alternative' or 'multiple' modernities, it suggests, are expressions, and articulations, of the contradictions of modernity which are now universalized across, as well as within, societies. If we are to speak of alternative or multiple modernities, which presently valorize the persistence of traditions and 'civilizational' legacies, we need to recognize that the very language of alternatives and multiplicity is enabled historically by the presupposition of a common modernity shaped by a globalizing capitalism.

## Key words

■ capitalism ■ globalization ■ global modernity ■ modernity ■ modernization

It is one of the profound ironies of our times that modernity should be in question more seriously than ever before at the very moment of its apparent global victory. If globalization means anything, it is the incorporation of societies globally into a capitalist modernity, with all the implications of the latter – economic, social, political, and cultural. While dynamized by the homogenizing and integrative forces and urges of capital, and its attendant organizational and cultural demands, globalization has complicated further contradictions between and within societies, including a fundamental contradiction between a seemingly irresistible modernity, and past legacies that not only refuse to go away, but draw

renewed vitality from the very globalizing process. Intensified and accelerated interactions between societies – that justify the discourse of globalization – are surely signs of the modern. Yet these very same relationships render modernity into a site of conflict and contention, raising fundamental questions about its historical and ethical meaning (or meaninglessness).

Important transformations in global relations over the past three decades call for a reconceptualized modernity that I describe here as ‘global modernity’.<sup>1</sup> Reconceptualizing modernity (to the point of renouncing it altogether) has been the goal of much scholarship during this same period, cutting across ideological and methodological divides. The effort to overcome Eurocentrism and to bring into modernity the voices, experiences and cultural legacies of others has driven discussions of modernity in fields that range from postcolonial studies to more conventional studies of modernization in sociology and political science.

Most revisionist studies of modernity and modernization project upon the past contemporary perspectives of globality, and argue that modernity all along has been global in scope, plural in form and direction, and hybrid not only across cultural boundaries but also in the relationship of the modern to the traditional. I do not question these conclusions. I nevertheless suggest that there is much to be gained in clarity from viewing ‘global modernity’ as a period concept, to contrast it with a preceding period which, for all its complexities, was indeed marked by Euro/American domination and hegemony. The nearly unchallenged domination by the United States of the world presently is a continuation of the power relations of modernity, but in a world that has been transformed significantly in its economic and political configurations. For all the concentration of naked power, this world, when compared to a previous period of modernity dominated by Euro/America, is decentered ideologically and organizationally, including in the emergent values and organizations of political economy, which makes it possible to speak of a ‘globalcentrism’ against an earlier Eurocentrism (Coronil, 2000).

Modernity has been globalizing all along, but the realization of global modernity was obstructed by two products of capitalist modernity itself: colonialism and socialism. Decolonization since the Second World War has restored the voices of the colonized, and opened the way to recognition of the spatial and temporal co-presence of those whom a Eurocentric modernization discourse had relegated to invisibility and backwardness. Decolonization owed much to socialism as ideology, and the presence of socialist states. But as long as socialism persisted as a viable alternative to capitalism, the effects of decolonization were dissolved into the teleologies of Eurocentrically conceived modernity. The decline and fall of socialism in the course of the 1980s opened the way to the globalization of capital. It also eliminated socialism as a crucial obstacle to cultural appropriations – and, therefore, the proliferation – of modernities, which now find expression in the fragmentation of a single modernity into multiple and alternative modernities. Questioning of Eurocentric teleology in either the capitalist or the socialist guise has revealed modernity in its full historicity, and ‘geohistorical’ diversity,<sup>2</sup> which is a condition of what I describe here as global modernity.

It was capitalist modernity that produced the societies – as we know them presently – which now make their own claims on modernity against Euro/American domination. The disappearance of the socialist alternative to capitalism may be one important reason for the ascendancy in these claims of arguments based on cultural autonomy or persistence. But so is the globalization of capital in the emergence of new centers of corporate capital, most importantly in East and Southeast Asia, in the increasingly diverse labor force that staffs transnational corporations, and in the transnationalization of marketing and advertising, which create new cultural faultlines that call for close management of culture. Culture looms large in contemporary scholarship and politics, as it is used in a number of capacities: in opposition to modernity, in explanations of local appropriations of the modern, or in its newfound significance as an instrument of political and corporate management. This new situation is a product of modernity but it needs to be recognized nevertheless for the new kinds of contradictions it presents, which differentiate it from a period of Eurocentric modernity. Global modernity unifies and divides the globe in new ways. It does not do to emphasize one or the other as with naïve ideas of global unity expressed in slogans of globalization, or obscurantist notions of conflict that see the world fracturing along ‘cultural’ divides impervious to all common political and economic activity – as well as to the pervasiveness of class, gender and various spatial divisions that cut across ‘cultural’ boundaries.

### Multiple Modernities

Ours is a time of reversals when traditions and ideologies that were assigned by modernization discourse to the dustbin of history have made a comeback with a vengeance, empowered by reconfigurations in global relations, and legitimized by the repudiation of Eurocentrism. A case in point is the Confucian revival in contemporary China. In his seminal work on Chinese modernity published in the early 1960s, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, Joseph Levenson argued that Marxist historicism had resolved a problem that had plagued Chinese intellectuals ever since the encounter with the Modern West had forced a parochialization of Confucian values from their once universalistic status into the circumscribed endowment of a national past; an endowment, moreover, that was inconsistent with the struggle for modernity. Continued attachment to Confucianism despite loss of faith in its intellectual validity represented for Levenson a tension between history and value. Confucianism, necessary as the historical source of a Chinese national identity, had to be overcome if China was to become a nation.

Levenson in his work sought to understand the source of the appeals of Marxism which he found in the ability of Marxist historicism to resolve this fundamental tension in Chinese intellectual life by relegating Confucianism to the museum, salvaging Confucius for the nation, but also rendering him irrelevant to the living present. As he put it:

Confucius . . . redeemed from both the class aberration (feudal) of idolization and the class aberration (bourgeois) of destruction, might be kept as a national monument, unworshipped, yet also unshattered. In effect, the disdain of a modern pro-Western *bourgeoisie* for Confucius cancelled out, for the dialecticians, a feudal class's pre-modern devotion. The Communists, driving history to a classless synthetic fulfilment, retired Confucius honorably into the silence of the museum. (Levenson, 1968, vol. 3: 79)

It may be one of the profound ironies of our times that this situation has been reversed since Levenson wrote his analysis: Confucius has been brought out of the museum once again, while it is the revolution that is on its way to being muse-umified; not by feudal worshippers of Confucius, but by the bourgeoisie who once disdained Confucius, and the Communist Party that remains in power as the beneficiary of that revolution.

Levenson's analysis, and his evaluation of what the revolution had achieved in resolving the tension between the past and the present, were informed by a Euro-centric teleology of modernity; the claims of the values of ancient civilizations must inevitably be relegated to the past with the victory of modernity as represented by the modern nation. If the pasts of those civilizations have been resurrected once again, it is not only because of the passing of revolutions, but more importantly the questioning of this teleology that has come to the fore as globalization has replaced modernization as a paradigm of contemporary change.

The passing of the Chinese Revolution, as of socialist revolutions in general, may be attributed to their particular failings. Similarly, advocates of the Confucian revival may attribute the revival to the particular virtues inherent in Confucianism. While there may be something to be said for such views, in my view, they suffer from a debilitating parochialism that fails to account for a larger historical context where it is not just socialist revolutions that are relegated to the past but the very idea of revolution, and it is not just the Confucian tradition that is at issue, but the return of traditions in general. Nor do such views explain attempts to articulate Confucianism to values of entire regions, such as East and Southeast Asia, or of an entire continent, such as Asia. Further complicating the situation are conflicts that attend these efforts. For all the talk about Asia and Asian values over the past few years, the idea of Asia remains quite problematic, and so do the ideological and cultural sources from which Asian values are to be derived. The most obvious competitor to the Confucian revival may be the Islamic revival that has also become visible during this same period but the period has also witnessed a Hindu revival in India, and right-wing nationalists in Turkey, echoing East Asian nationalists and their EuroAmerican cheerleaders, have resurrected earlier Pan-Turanian utopias to assert that the twenty-first century will be a Turkish century. In other societies in Asia, Buddhism continues to hold sway. It is difficult to avoid an inference that all these revivals, coinciding temporally, are products of the same world situation, though they obviously have local inflections depending on social context and ideological claims.

These reversals have been accompanied by challenges to modernity's ways of knowing. The past twenty years have witnessed calls for the 'Sinicization' and

'Islamicization' of sociology. There has been a revival in the People's Republic of China of the so-called 'national studies', which advocates a return not only to the epistemologies but the methodologies of classical studies. The attacks on history and science of thinkers such as Vandana Shiva, Ashis Nandy and Vine Deloria, Jr., gain a hearing in the most hallowed organs and institutions of EuroAmerican learning. While the effect of such criticism is felt most deeply in the humanities and the social sciences, as abstract a field as mathematics is under some pressure to recognize 'ethno-mathematics' as a legitimate area of study. Even US foundations have joined the chorus of criticism against the equation of modernity with Western ways of knowing.<sup>3</sup>

What is at issue here at the broadest level is a loss of consensus over the institutional and intellectual content of modernity even as modernity is globalized. As one critic puts it uncompromisingly:

Colonialism and modernity are indivisible features of the history of industrial capitalism . . . to reestablish three points: The first is that 'modernity' must not be mistaken for a thing in itself, for that sleight of hand obliterates the context of political economy. The second is that once modernity *is* construed to be prior to colonialism, it becomes all too easy to assume, wrongly, the existence of an originary and insurmountable temporal lag separating colonialism from modernity. Thus, the third point is that the modernity of non-European colonies is as indisputable as the colonial core of European modernity. (Barlow, 1997: 1)

Modernity is not a thing but a relationship, and being part of the relationship is the ultimate marker of the modern. The view expressed here is a postcolonial rephrasing of critiques of modernization discourse that got under way in the 1960s to challenge the spatial and temporal distancing of traditions from modernity, the deployments of culture in explanations of progress and backwardness, and the disassociation of questions of development from questions of underdevelopment – all of which served to illustrate the complicity of existing discourses of modernity and modernization with colonialism.<sup>4</sup> These critiques also questioned the methodological validity of using institutions and values derived from the Euro/American experiences as criteria for modernity in general, and demanded a shift of attention instead to relationships that bound together the modern and the premodern and shaped both. Their goal was to illustrate the ideological nature of discourses of modernity by exposing the tacit equation of modernity in these discourses with capitalist modernity. Alternative modernity, then, could be conceived as socialist modernity of one kind or another (the historicization of socialism, the prelude to its demise, preceded the historicization of capitalism, which would appear with globalization).

Earlier critiques, therefore, retained a view of European modernity as the source of modernity, which is questioned in the statement above. Most importantly, while earlier critiques shifted attention to structures of political economy in order to counteract the culturalism of modernization discourse, postcolonial criticism of modernity has brought culture back in to reaffirm the persistence of local subjectivities, and the local appropriations of capitalist modernity. Even in

the more political economically sensitive versions of postcolonial criticism, such as that of Barlow's earlier, there is the danger of slippage from an insistence on the contemporaneity of all societies that are parts of the relationships of modernity, and help define the latter, to the potential or actual 'modernness' of all such societies, which is quite misleading, and imposes upon the past a consciousness that is a product of a postcolonial demand for cultural recognition and equality.<sup>5</sup>

Postcolonial criticism is driven by an urge to deconstruct claims to cultural essentialism, even though it has done more than its share in contributing to the 'culture-talk' that has become so audible during the last decade, reaching its crescendo with the discussions surrounding September 11. The latter also dramatized that, contrary to the assertions of postcolonial criticism, what has been at work for the past two decades is not the dissolution of cultural essentialism but the hardening of cultural boundaries that accompanied the revival of cultural fundamentalisms around the globe. Boundaries have been (and are) in a process of reconfiguration, to be sure, but rather than disappear, they have been proliferating, as new claims to ethnic and cultural identity produce demands for new sovereignties. Indeed, for all its purported constructivism, the very urge in postcolonial criticism to overcome a dichotomous modernity/tradition distinction invites by the back door reified notions of culture. Radical postcolonial criticism has been at one with a resurgent modernization discourse and contemporary geopolitical analysis in perpetuating reified views of cultural traditions, identified with political or civilizational units that are themselves the products of modernity's political imagination.

Statements such as those of Barlow are products of a 'radical' reading of the same situation that prompted the more geopolitically oriented Samuel Huntington to conclude that with socialism out of the way, the major problem of the present was not a problem of conflict between nations but a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington, 1993, 1996a, 1996b). Two aspects of Huntington's argument are directly pertinent here. First, that the civilizations he referred to, while they represented long-standing cultural traditions, were not relics of the past but were products of modernity that were empowered by their claims on modernity. Second, that to impose the values of the modern West on these societies not only would not work, but also represents a kind of imperialism.

Huntington's argument resonates with contemporary cultural claims on modernity in many non-Western societies. It is also echoed, if with greater circumspection, in recent efforts to revise modernization discourse. In his introduction to a recently published special issue of *Daedalus*, entitled 'Multiple Modernities', the distinguished analyst of modernity and editor of the issue, S.N. Eisenstadt, writes that the idea of 'multiple modernities'

... goes against the views long prevalent in scholarly and general discourse. It goes against the view of the 'classical' theories of modernization and of the convergence of industrial societies prevalent in the 1950s, and indeed against the classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim and (to a large extent) even of Weber ... that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in Europe and the basic institutional

constellations that emerged there would ultimately take over in all modernizing and modern societies . . . The actual developments in modernizing societies have refuted the homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions of this Western program of modernity. While a general trend toward structural differentiation developed across a wide range of institutions in most of these societies . . . the ways in which these arenas were defined and organized varied greatly . . . giving rise to multiple institutional and ideological patterns. These patterns did not constitute simple continuations in the modern era of the traditions of their respective societies. Such patterns were distinctively modern, though greatly influenced by specific cultural premises, traditions and historical experiences. All developed distinctly modern dynamics and modes of interpretation, for which the original Western project constituted the crucial (and usually ambivalent) reference point. (Eisenstadt, 2000: 1)

Eisenstadt's comments are echoed by another contributor to the volume, Bjorn Wittrock, who reaffirms modernity as a common condition, but goes even further in evacuating it of substantial uniformity even in its origins in Europe, while acknowledging the persistence of the pre- and the non-modern as constituents of modernity. The question Wittrock poses is deceptively simple: whether we associate modernity with an epoch, a certain period in human history, or with 'distinct phenomena and processes in a given society at a given time'. He suggests that 'the first perspective poses the problem of where to locate the beginning, and maybe the end of the modern age. However, once this has been determined, the question of whether we live in one or many modernities becomes trivial' (Wittrock, 2000: 31). In order to substantiate modernity, it then becomes necessary to locate it in certain institutions, or modes of thinking, which is Wittrock's choice (as it is of Anthony Giddens, with 'reflexivity' as a distinguishing feature of modernity) (Giddens, 1990). The important question here is to shift the location of modernity from nations, regions and civilizations (themselves the creations of a Eurocentric modernity) to institutions and ways of thinking – in other words, discourses conceived both in linguistic and institutional terms. It is possible to suggest in this perspective, as Wittrock does, that there is no such thing as a Western, European, or American modernity, as these all represent different mixtures of modern, pre-modern or non-modern elements; there are simply modern discourses that co-exist with pre- or non-modern discourses that themselves represent all kinds of local varieties. As modernity is deterritorialized from its spatial associations, moreover, it may also be globalized for, whatever the origins, the discourse is transportable across geographical or cultural boundaries. It is worth quoting his concluding lines:

There was, from the very origins of modern societal institutions, an empirically undeniable and easily observable variety of institutional and cultural forms, even in the context of Western and Central Europe. This became even more obvious once the institutional projects that had been originally conceived in Europe were spread to other regions of the world. This multiformity means that we may still speak of a variety of different civilizations in the sense that origins of institutions and roots of cosmological thinking are highly different in different parts of the world. There is no reason to assume that all these differences will just fade away and be replaced by an



encompassing, worldwide civilization. However, modernity is a global condition that now affects all our actions, interpretations, and habits, across nations and irrespective of which civilizational roots we may have or lay claim to. In this sense, it is a common condition on a global scale that we live in and with, engage in dialogue about, and that we have to reach out to grasp. (Wittrock, 2000: 58–9)

While not the cause of global uncertainty over modernity, the importance of the disappearance of the socialist alternative to capitalism in creating this uncertainty has not been sufficiently appreciated. The fall of socialism, with its promise of the possibility of a rational resolution of the problems of modernity, has shaken faith in rationalism, itself a hallmark of modernity. Socialism also provided for more than a century the primary mode of resistance to capitalism, and the possibility of an alternative to it, which in a post-socialist world finds expression now in revivals of native traditions as alternative modernities. At the same time, the disappearance of socialism has eliminated the possibility of an outside to capitalism, in the process forcing to the surface of consciousness the incoherence of the inside. Jean-Marie Guehenno writes that, 'the cold war acted like a vast magnet on the iron filings of political institutions. For several decades, the polarization of East and West gave an order to human societies . . . Today, the magnet has been cast aside, and the iron filings have become sparse little heaps' (1995: x). Guehenno is referring here mainly to political institutions, in particular the nation-state, but an even more interesting facet of fragmentation in the post-Cold War world are the lines of fracture that have appeared in the world of capitalism at its very moment of victory; in the proliferating references to different capitalisms and different cultures of capitalism, which may make it more proper presently to speak of a 'pan-capitalism', a conglomeration of capitalisms based on variant social and cultural repertoires, rather than 'Global Capitalism' that is homogeneous in its practices.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between the consciousness of globalization and the fragmentation of earlier visions of the world is stated most starkly by Zygmunt Bauman, who perceives in globalization the end of the universalisms that had constituted modernity:

It is this novel and uncomfortable perception of things getting out of hand which has been articulated (with little benefit to intellectual clarity) in the currently fashionable concept of *globalization*. The deepest meaning conveyed by the idea of globalization is that of the indeterminate, unruly and self-propelled character of world affairs; the absence of a centre, of a controlling desk, of a board of directors, of a managerial office. Globalization . . . is 'new world disorder' under another name. This trait, undetachable from the image of globalization, sets it radically apart from another idea which it ostensibly replaced, that of 'universalization'. (Bauman, 1998: 59)

### Multiple Modernities: Global Multiculturalism

There is a wide range of answers to the question of the emergence of globalization as a paradigm at the end of the twentieth century; most of them technology

driven, and focused on the unification of the globe: from Marshall McLuhan's 'global village' to the view of the earth from outer space to the Internet. Answers that address only issues of global unity seem to me to render globalization into little more than an advanced stage of modernization. One answer that is often ignored, that seems to me to clamor for a hearing, is that the awareness of globalization is at once the product of a making of a Eurocentric order of the world, and of its breakdown, which now calls upon our consciousness to abandon the claims of Eurocentrism while retaining consciousness of globality, which would have been inconceivable without that same order. It was necessary, before globalization in this contemporary sense could emerge to the forefront of consciousness, for a EuroAmerican globality to lose its claims to universality as the end of history – which is evident in our day most conspicuously not in the economic sphere where those claims may still be sustained, but in the realms of culture and knowledge, which display a proliferation of challenges to Eurocentrism.

The latter are voiced most strongly in societies empowered by success in the capitalist economy. Equally important in empowering such challenges is the global visibility of postcolonial intellectuals, who find in the reassertion of native cultures and knowledge systems the means to combat the 'colonization of the mind' that survives past formal political decolonization. Failures of political decolonization, combined with the seeming inevitability of capitalism, have played a major part in the foregrounding of culture, which both provides an escape from politics, and a means to conduct politics by other means. The cultures and the knowledges that contemporary postcolonial intellectuals proclaim draw upon native pasts, but by no means point to a return to those pasts, as the pasts now revived are pasts that have been re-organized already by a consciousness of a century or more of social and political transformation; they are, in other words, not just postcolonial and postnational, but perhaps even post-global, as cultural contention and competition are played out presently on a terrain that itself presupposes an uncertain globality. The challenge to the cultural legacies of colonialism is informed by vastly different political affiliations and motivations, which are not necessarily more progressive than the object of their challenges; although that judgment itself is increasingly difficult to sustain as history itself is called into question. In some cases such challenges bolster the claims of the colonial modernity that they seek to challenge, while in others they can sustain their anti-colonialism only by resort to the most reactionary revivals of imagined pasts. But they have contributed in their different ways to undermining the universalist claims of Eurocentrism.

Claims to universal knowledge express under the circumstances hegemonic assumptions that continue to infuse contemporary arguments for globalization, also revealing its ties to existing structures of power. On the other hand, to abandon those claims is also to resign to the parochialness – and hence, the relativity – of all knowledge, which not only abolishes the commonalities born of centuries of global interactions, but also rules out communication across societal boundaries (wherever those may be drawn at any one time and place).

The downgrading of a Eurocentric modernity, accompanied by culturally driven claims on modernity, goes a long way toward explaining the contradictions to which I referred earlier, and why those contradictions may appear differently to participants in the new dialogue on modernity. On the other hand, too much preoccupation with Eurocentrism or colonialism also disguises fundamental questions of contemporary modernity that cut across so-called cultural divides, especially as the locations of modernity and culture are themselves thrown into question with the reconfigurations of economic and political organization globally.

What provokes immediate questions concerning the 'multiple modernities' idea is the concomitant ascendancy of globalization as a new paradigm for grasping the reconfiguration of power in the contemporary world. Globalization suggests inescapably that, for all its divisions around issues of culture, the world as we know it shares something in common, which is conceded in the quotations shown earlier in Eisenstadt's reference to an 'original Western project' that continues to serve as a 'reference point' globally, or Wittrock's description of modernity as a 'global condition'. Globalization differs from modernization by relinquishing a Eurocentric teleology to accommodate the possibility of different historical trajectories in the unfolding of modernity. But that still leaves open the question of what provides this world with a commonality which, if anything, is more powerful in its claims than anything that could be imagined in the past.

It is possible that fear of intellectual reductionism, or functionalism, or simply sounding like a Marxist when Marxism is supposedly discredited, makes for a reluctance to stress the context of current discussions of modernity within the political economy of contemporary capitalism. And yet, this context is important to grasping not only arguments for globalization, but also the hearing granted to assertions of cultural difference. I would like to underline 'the hearing' here, for while cultural differences have been present all along, what distinguishes our times from times past is a willingness to listen to invocations of cultural legacies not as reactionary responses to modernity but as the very conditions of a global modernity. Especially pertinent is the challenge to Eurocentric conceptions of capitalism that became audible from the late 1970s with the emergence of East Asian societies as a new center of capitalist power, that remapped the geography of capitalism but also, in its very de-centering of capitalism, signalled the arrival of a global capitalism. According to this perspective, 'multiple modernities' may signify either the proliferation of modernities (in its multiplicity), or its universalization (with the multiplicities as local inflections of a common discourse, but also as its agents).

There is a second problem, however, that points to mappings of the world that are in conflict with arguments for globalization, that calls for attention to a different dimension. 'Multiple modernities' suggests a global multiculturalism, that reifies cultures in order to render manageable cultural and political incoherence; diversity management on a global scale, so to speak. How else to explain the continual slippage in the analyses above into the language of nations and civilizations against the recognition of the internal incoherence of the entities so

described? Arguments for 'multiple modernities', no less than arguments for globalization, state their case in terms of cultural differences that are aligned around spatialities that are the products themselves of modernization: nations, cultures, civilizations, and ethnicities. In identifying 'multiplicity' with boundaries of nations, cultures, civilizations and ethnicities, the idea of 'multiple modernities' seeks to contain challenges to modernity by conceding the possibility of culturally different ways of being modern. While this is an improvement over an earlier Eurocentric modernization discourse, it perpetuates the culturalist biases of the latter, relegating to the background social and political differences that are the products not just of past legacies but of modernity, and cut across national or civilizational boundaries. The framing of modernities within the boundaries of reified cultural entities feeds on, and in turn legitimizes, the most conservative cultural claims on modernity. What an idea of multiple modernities ignores is that the question of modernity is subject to debate within the cultural, civilizational, national or ethnic spaces it takes as its units of analysis. The problem of Eurocentrism, its foundation in capitalism as a dynamic force, and attendant problems of modernity are not simply problems between nations and civilizations, but problems that are internal to their constitution. The most important difference between now and then is not the appearance of challenges to Eurocentrism from different cultural perspectives, but the recognition that what seemed to be a problem for non-EuroAmerican societies is a problem for EuroAmerican societies as well. As the problem of cultural modernity is brought into questionings of EuroAmerican domination as Eurocentrism long has been a problem of other modernities; calling into question the boundaries in terms of which we think modernity, in other words, the very locations of modernity.

A consideration of these questions compels a somewhat more complicated approach to the question of the relationship between globalization and universalism. Globalization coincides with the disillusionment with universalism, and in turn has opened up spaces for rethinking alternative ways of knowing. On the other hand, it is too easy in the enthusiasm or despair over globalization to overlook that globalization also serves as an agent of spreading the epistemological assumptions of Eurocentrism, which acquire progressively more compelling power as capitalism is globalized. The social sciences and the humanities as we have known them are not merely 'European' or 'American', but are entangled in a social system of which capitalism has been the dynamic formative moment. The globalization of capitalism has given additional force to the ideology of development, or 'developmentalism', which forces all societies under the threat of extinction to acquire the technologies of knowledge that contribute to this end. These knowledges are no longer just 'European' or 'American', but are internal to societies world-wide which provide the personnel for the global institutions of capital.

This is not to suggest that other, non-European, traditions may not serve as reservoirs of values and knowledges with which to amend and enrich, modern ways of knowing; but, for better or worse, that is not the same as taking modernity out of the picture by an act of will, least of all by intellectuals who are

better prepared by their education to participate in EuroAmerican dialogues on modernity than to serve as representatives of their so-called 'cultural traditions'.<sup>7</sup> We need to remember also that the present is witness not just to revivals of traditions, but also to an enthusiastic embrace by elites globally of the promises of technological modernity. Even the re-assertion of traditions often takes the form of articulating those traditions to the demands of a global capitalism. Where there is a stubborn clinging to imagined traditions against the demands of modernity, as in the case for instance of the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Iranian Revolution in its more extreme phases, the result is not acceptance but isolation. On the other hand, those native scholars who seek to 'Sinicize' or 'Islamicize' sociology quickly find out that such goals cannot be accomplished without a simultaneous 'sociologization' of Chinese values or of Islam (Ma, 1985; Gole, 2000). The very process of nativization reveals the impossibility of sustaining reified, holistic notions of traditions, which already have been transformed by modernity, and appear most prominently as sites of conflict between different social interests and different visions of the modern.

These developments do not signal the end of modernity as much as its globalization. What may be most important about claims such as the above is the proliferation of claims upon modernity. The former colonial 'subjects' of Euro/American projects of modernity are empowered in a postcolonial world to assert their own projects of modernity. Those who are the most successful in doing so are those who have acquired an indispensable partnership in the world of global capital, and demand recognition of their cultural subjectivities, invented or not, in the making of a global modernity.

Against a seemingly concerted effort to de-politicize culture and knowledge by displacing political questions to the realm of culture, what needs urgent attention presently is the political meaning of the culturalist claims on epistemology. Assertions of cultural difference do not necessarily make for good or desirable politics, as they serve reactionary as well as progressive politics. To take at face value any declaration of difference leaves us at the mercy of ethical and political relativism, as well as of corporate manipulations which seek to define difference.

## Conclusion

The issues discussed above have been about to emerge over the past decade, but they have acquired far greater urgency since the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. Almost overnight, 'the clash of civilizations' seemed to have become the reality of world politics. The traumatic events of September 11, and responses to them, also indicate the ideological erasure of political problems in the privileging of culture in explanations of contemporary modernity. Culture may be an issue in global modernity, but is it *the issue*?

The proliferation of modernities has been important conceptually in overcoming an earlier hegemonic discourse of modernization that identified

Euro/America as the beginning and the end of modernity – that also showed others their future, to be reached through the mediation of Euro/America. The historicization of modernity reveals it in its diversity and complexity from the beginning, indeed, calls into question the very notion of a beginning as the strands that went into the making of modernities have their origins in what modernity rendered in hindsight into the pre-modern, the nonmodern or the traditional. It reveals similarly that what modernity is supposed to have left behind stubbornly persists, rising to the forefront on occasion (as at the present), further blurring boundaries between the modern and the pre-modern, and between the experiences of Euro/America and their Others. Historicization of modernity in both these senses opens up the possibility of re-thinking globality more democratically.

This promise of historicizing modernity is aborted, nevertheless, by the burden of culturalism that is the legacy of contemporary discussions of an earlier modernization discourse. Culturalism conceptually leads once again to the dehistoricization and desocialization of the idea of culture, and makes it into an endowment of political units such as nations or even more abstractly defined units such as civilizations, that are themselves products of modernity. In the process, it erases the complexities of cultures concretely conceived in their social and historical 'embeddedness'. Samuel Huntington, whose 'clash of civilizations' played an important part in the 1990s in popularizing reified notions of culture, ironically backed away from this position in the aftermath of September 11, querying, 'if you want to call the Islamic world, what number do you call?' (Huntington, 2001). If 'multiple modernities' is to fulfill the promise of a more historical understanding of culture, what is needed is a more precise consideration of the units of culture in their seemingly ceaseless historical motions.

Culturalism is also depoliticizing in deflecting political questions to the realm of culture. Ideas of multiple or alternative modernities, conceived along cultural boundaries, seem quite benign in recognizing that modernity may follow trajectories other than the European, but they have little to say on what such multiplicity of trajectories may mean in terms of contemporary configurations of global power. It is ironic that global power should be more concentrated than ever before in history, and more intransigent in the pursuit of its prerogatives, even as liberal scholarship proclaims the multiplicity of modernities. It is important that culture be understood in its deployment in struggles for power.

The traumatic events of September 11 overshadowed a much milder 'civilizational' conflict that had taken place just a few months earlier over Hainan Island in the South China Sea in the 'accidental' collision between a United States spy plane, and a People's Republic of China airforce jet.<sup>8</sup> The Hainan Island affair, seemingly of trivial consequence, and even comical in some respects, is nevertheless revealing of the refusal of the United States to curtail its global power, and to recognize the claims to sovereignty of others in their own backyards, which also is important in understanding the much more traumatic incident of September 11.

The United States has behaved in recent years as if it had boundless sovereignty that is limited only by practical considerations of power, which legitimizes



interference in the affairs of others.<sup>9</sup> Such behavior makes a mockery of the supposed recognition of the claims of others to modernity. An idea such as 'multiple modernities' needs to be viewed within this context of power. Regardless of the intentions of the scholars who propound those ideas (who represent a broad political range), there is good reason to question ideas of 'multiple' or 'alternative' modernities as expressions of an improved, genuinely democratic approach to global modernity; rather than simply a new mode of managing conflict by containing it when Eurocentric notions of modernity have lost their hegemony (but not their dominance). The latter is explicitly acknowledged by a scholar such as Samuel Huntington who is also involved in policy-making. While it may be unfair to generalize from his case to that of others (especially those who purportedly stand at the other end of the political spectrum, such as some post-colonial scholars), the resonance between domestic and global multiculturalism raises questions about the effects, if not the intentions, of understandings of modernity that foreground culture, more often than not as a euphemism for ethnicity and race. There are also systemic reasons for questioning such claims, given the enthusiastic embrace of economic globalization by elites 'multiculturally' even as they proclaim their particular cultural identities.

Democratization of our understanding of modernity also presents a new kind of predicament: helplessness before a global retreat from all the positive achievements of modernity in the name of cultural identities and legacies, which seem to command greater respect these days than human rights. September 11 has dramatized the depoliticizing moves of new discourses of modernity in another sense as well, in their refusal to address the politics of societies that are now included in modernity. It is interesting that the immediate response to September 11 among the more enlightened groups in the United States was a call for a better understanding of Islam, rather than of the historical, political and social origins of the event, which is in fact little more than a contemporary manifestation of the Orientalist elevation of text over event and history, that continues to shape the understanding of both 'East-West' relations, and the dynamics of 'Eastern' societies.<sup>10</sup>

As I have noted above, modernity is a problem globally; not just an East-West or a North-South problem, but a problem within individual societies: there are fundamentalists in Europe and the United States, just as there are progressives in Iran or Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> A culturalist approach to modernity, such as in advocacies of multiple or alternative modernities, erases these conflicts by substituting a homogenized notion of culture as the identifying mark of societies, in the process, erasing conflicts over culture that dynamize the politics of those societies. Cultural homogenization, we may add, plays into the hands of the most reactionary elements in society (whether of the Third or the First World). It is also the case, as with Iran or Afghanistan, for instance, that it was US efforts to contain and defeat Communism that catapulted political reactionaries into power.

This points to a third aspect of multiculturalist notions of modernity: their emphasis on difference against commonality. Recognition of difference is important, but it is equally necessary to recognize that contemporary differences derive

their meaning from a common experience of modernity; indeed, it is often quite difficult to distinguish differences that define trajectories of modernity from differences produced by modernity. This all points to the fundamental importance of viewing modernity in terms of relationships. It also underlines the relevance of accounting for modernity in systemic or structural terms, most importantly structures of political economy, that provide the context for difference.

Postcolonial criticism could help in overcoming some of these problems in contemporary discussions of modernity. The postcolonial understanding of culture is deconstructive and historicizing. Moreover, postcolonial insistence on understanding modernity in terms of relationships is an important antidote to the mutually distancing implications of culturalist understandings of modernity. This requires, however, that postcolonial criticism should overcome anxieties about totalities, and return analysis to the systemic understandings of difference in which postcolonial criticism has its origins. A postcolonial criticism that wallows in identity politics merely feeds into the culturalism (and political conservatism) of contemporary understandings of modernity. Reconceptualizing modernity as global modernity may help overcome some of these problems in allowing recognition of the dialectics of modernity in its globalization. Global modernity bears upon it the mark of European origins in its formulation (as must any reference to modernity). On the other hand, it is also less bound to those origins than such concepts as postmodernity or globalization. It allows for recognition of both the unities and the divisions of a contemporary modernity, in which the legacies of modernity are very much in evidence, but subject to new pressures. Most importantly, global modernity as a contemporary condition is marked not by the disintegration of modernity, but its reconfiguration around a global center, albeit of necessity an absent center.

## Notes

- 1 My usage of 'global modernity' here needs to be distinguished from the use of that term in the plural, 'global modernities', never mind such terms as 'alternative modernities' or 'multiple modernities', as I am arguing here that there is a single modernity, of which there is a multiplicity of expressions and articulations. Modernity was no doubt the product of historical interactions, including colonialism, and not just a *sui generis* internal development of European society, as in Eurocentric interpretations. That does not point to multiple modernities, however, but the emergence of a global modernity, still at work, in which Europe was to play a pivotal role. For 'global modernities', see Featherstone et al. (1997).
- 2 For 'geohistorical', see Taylor (1999). Historicity in my usage below is quite the same as Taylor's 'geohistory', as I denote by it both temporal and spatial dimensions of location.
- 3 For the 'Sinicization' of sociology, see Cai and Xiao (1985). Islamicization of sociology is discussed in Gole (2000). See also Park and Chang (1999). Shiva, Nandy and Deloria, Jr are the authors of many works. For representative titles, see Shiva (1989),



- Nandy (1995), and Deloria, Jr (1997). For recent discussions of knowledge systems with reference to Pacific studies, see Borofsky (2000). For ethnomathematics, see Greene (2000). For foundations, see Heilbrunn (1996). Nandy and Deloria, Jr were distinguished speakers at the Duke University Pivotal Ideas series in Spring 2000 and Spring 2001 respectively. For a discussion of these challenges in relation to modernity, see Dirlik, 'Reading Ashis Nandy: The Return of the Past or Modernity with a Vengeance', in Dirlik (2000).
- 4 For a sample of this literature that represents different political perspectives, see Huntington (1971: 283–322), Tipps (1973) and Dirlik (1974). This literature was a response to the revolutionary upheavals and national liberation movements of the 1960s, and the political and ideological complicity of modernization theorists and discourses with (by then) US imperialism. It was these same upheavals that were responsible for the emergence of alternatives to modernization discourse in world-system analysis and dependency theory, associated with such seminal revisionists as Samir Amin, Fernando H. Cardoso, André Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein. The contemporary 'cultural turn' in analyses of global modernity turns its back not only on the establishment of modernization discourse of an earlier period, but also on these radical challenges to it, which are now tarred with the same brush of 'Eurocentrism'.
  - 5 For the classic statement of the issue of contemporaneity, see Fabian (1983).
  - 6 I owe this term to Majid Tehranian, and thank him for allowing me to use it in a slightly modified sense than his.
  - 7 Thus a distinguished Chinese academic, and a leader in the 'national studies' movement, writes that Chinese tradition must itself be reinterpreted to accord with the demands of the age, but it contains fundamental ideas that can contribute to the solution of fundamental problems of our age. If the emergence of civilizations marked the beginning of the first axial age in the first millennium BC, he suggests, the cooperation of 'civilizations' may signal the beginning of a second axial age (Tang, 2000: 3).
  - 8 'Confucian' civilization, centered around China, was identified by Huntington in the essays cited above as a major competitor with the 'West', in addition to Islam. As I remarked above, Confucianism as a cultural force was an important element in provoking the cultural turn of the late 1970s and 1980s. It was also discredited by the economic downturn with the Asian Crisis of 1997. 'Confucianism', more than Islam, illustrates the coincidence of global (capitalist) and domestic (decline of socialism) factors in the elevation of culture in explanations of modernity.
  - 9 For further discussion of this question of sovereignty, see Dirlik (in print).
  - 10 This is not just an American problem, but part of a global revival of culturalism that was obviously never erased by materialist critiques of modernity, and has drawn renewed vitality from the reassertion of cultural nationalism, the revival of religious identities, and conflicts over identity provoked by intensifying motions of peoples. For an example, see Senocak (2000).
  - 11 I have discussed this extensively, with reference to China, in Dirlik (2002). The present article, in the conceptualization it offers, builds on this earlier essay.

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