

Entangled Modernities

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Abstract

Modernity is better defined as a time orientation, instead of as a set of institutions, which usually smuggles in some provincial or other aprioristic assumptions. A time conception of modernity also gives a precise meaning to postmodernity. Modernity in this non-Eurocentric sense, entails several different, competing master narratives, different social forces of, and conflicts between, modernity and anti-modernity, and different cultural contextualizations of the past–future contrast. But these different varieties do not simply coexist and challenge each other, they are entangled with each other in various ways. Starting from observing how different time warps were interwoven in vanguard modernist art, an analytical framework for grasping, understanding, and explaining the entanglement of modernities is spelled out.

Key words

■ entangled modernities ■ Eurocentrism ■ modern art ■ modern history ■ modernity ■ multiple modernities

'Entangled modernities' is a focus of reflection, investigation, and analysis, from different angles, with different eyes, and with open-ended, expectably variable outcomes.¹ It emerges out of a profound dissatisfaction, first of all with Eurocentrism and, after the Second World War, North Atlanticist West-centrism of mainstream nineteenth- and twentieth-century views of the contemporary world and its history, but also with prevailing idealistic notions – either of positive ideals or of dangerous or vicious ideals – of modernity and with straightened outlines of its history. As Jürgen Osterhammel (2000: 22) has pointed out: 'The "West" is basically a postwar invention, the symbolic supplement to Nato and the OECD.'

The problematic of entangled modernities is then part of two broader intellectual efforts, towards a global scholarship and towards a new historical self-conception.

The towering significance of this Eurocentrism to be broken with is underlined by the fact that one of its most extreme formulations was written by one of the very greatest scholars of the twentieth century, one who in 1920 wrote:

A product of modern European civilisation, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilisation, and in Western civilisation only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value.

'The author admits that he is inclined to think the importance of biological heredity very great', but as he for the time being sees no way of 'measuring either the extent or, above all, the form of its influence on the development investigated here', he opts for a look into comparative religion (Weber, 1920/1967: 13, 30; emphasis in the original).

Second, questions about how the contemporary world has been shaped are issues of self-conception and self-understanding, as well as of genealogy and historiography. They pertain to questions of identity as well as to those of analysis and explanation.

Like most discourses on modernity, the interest in entangled modernities is an attempt to grasp the present as history with a wide interdisciplinary grip, relating cultures and social institutions and social conflicts. The difference from the rival idealisms of programmatic pro-modernity, presented with great erudition and sophistication by Jürgen Habermas (1985) and of denunciatory post-modernist anti-modernity, is a searchlight on actual trajectories to and through modernity, on actual forms of discourse, movements, conflicts, institutions, rather than on ideals, blueprints, and stereotypes.

A fruitful study of modernity with these aims has to start from a non-Eurocentric definition of modernity, while Anthony Giddens (1990: 1) not so long ago offered an almost disarmingly candid Eurocentric definition: '“modernity” refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence'. The least arbitrary way, then, seems to be to consider modernity as a culture, an epoch, a society, a social sphere having a particular *time orientation*. That is, a time conception looking forward to this worldly future, open, novel, reachable or constructable, a conception seeing the present as a possible preparation for a future, and the past either as something to leave behind or as a heap of ruins, pieces of which might be used for building a new future. Modernity in this sense does not per se designate a particular chronological period or any particular institutional forms. In principle, different periods of modernity, followed by de-modernization or re-traditionalization, are conceivable.

Empirically, the incidence of modernity can be assessed by looking at the temporal orientation of specified institutional spheres, such as the production of knowledge, the arts, the economy, politics. The predominant time culture of these spheres may very well differ in a given society at any given point in time. Often the tenor of elite social discourse provides the basis for general characterizations of a society as modern or pre-modern or traditional.

Postmodernity would be a culture in which distinctions between the past and the future, between the old and the new have lost their significance. Conceiving the world as one of trendless flux would exemplify this.

Globality has two basic meanings: finitude and connectivity, both planetary. Universality, by contrast, denotes unlimited extension. Because of its modes of historical generation, modernity has to be seen as a global phenomenon, rather than a universal one. As such, it should be the study object of a global history and a global social science. A global approach to social phenomena means focusing on global variability, global connectivity, and global inter-communication. It also implies a global look at processes of change, of continuity and discontinuity.

To capture the actual globality of modernity, the latter had better be seen in the plural, as constituting a set of 'multiple modernities', a personal bridge from the post-Second World War North Atlanticist 'modernization theory' (Eisenstadt et al., 2000). The multiplicity of modernities may be approached in many different ways. My own work has concentrated on different processes of emergence and their consequences, and on different discourses of past–future contrasts, more about which below. The emphasis on entangled modernities is meant to highlight, not just the co-existence of different modernities but also their inter-relations, current as well as historical.

Entanglements

The imbrications brought to light by the focus on entangled modernities may be studied in a variety of manifestations, in the set-up and functioning of social institutions and systems, in the formation of and the enacting by social actors, and in discourse, in art, and in symbolic forms in general. However, these manifestations seem to derive from two more general processes of the making of modernity.

Most generally, there are the constitutive entanglements of modernity and some tradition, coming out of the infinitely variable incompleteness of every modern rupture with the past, and out of the plasticity of most traditions. Second, there are the geo-historical entanglements, of the very different but significantly interacting and mutually influencing socio-political roads to and through modernity.

In the social sciences and in political discourse there has been a strong tendency to see imbrications of modernity and tradition as exceptions, deviations, *Sonderwege*, or at least as limitations of modernity or modernization. By contrast, in modernist art, in modernist aesthetics, and in modernist art criticism some selective use of tradition has often been explicitly put forward as a significant part of avant-garde art. 'I cannot insist enough that Modernism has never meant, and does not mean now, anything like a break with the past . . . Modernist art continues the past without gap or break,' said Clement Greenberg (1960/1993: 92), *the* art critic of High Modernism in general, and of Abstract Expressionism in particular.

T.S. Eliot, arguably the most important modernist poet of the twentieth century, described himself as 'classicist, royalist, and Anglo-catholic', echoing his

far right-wing French *inspireteur* Charles Maurras. His journal *Criterion* espoused Toryism as 'reaction' and 'revolution', against 'suburban democracy' (Ackroyd, 1984: 41, 143). Eliot's traditionalism was not just political posturing and religious belief. Indian tradition, the Bible, and Dante, for example, are all major references in his poetry.

The most iconoclastic of twentieth-century vanguardist modernisms was Italian Futurism, which turned the tables on the whole art tradition of the past, calling for libraries to be set on fire and the flooding of museums, and embraced the energy of machines and the speed of a 'roaring automobile, more beautiful than Nike of Samothrace'. But it also anchored itself in nineteenth-century Italian nationalism, the *Risorgimento*, which led Marinetti and most, if not all, of his followers into Italian colonial war mobilization and, later, into Fascism (Lista, 2001).

Aesthetic modernism, Perry Anderson (1992: 34–5) has argued persuasively, rose, not out of a *tabula rasa* or one creative act of rupture, but within a socio-cultural triangle of a highly formalized aesthetic academicism buttressed by powerful landowning classes, an incipient emergence of the new technologies of the second industrial revolution, and, third, an imagined proximity of social revolution.

Greenberg's picture of a seamless web between modernist art and its past may have been drawn with some poetic licence, but a (chess) knight's mobility, jumping current tradition to some more remote one and re-inserting the latter in some project of creative innovation has been a common modernist strategy. The empirical history of modernity is not linear.

Any sober look at the historical trajectories of modernity should yield great scepticism at idealist conceptions of straight roads or of full-blown modern and modernizing revolutions against '*Sonderwege*', 'passive revolutions', and other deviations from the right path. British modernity maintained until recently a ruling landed aristocracy and gentry, with an elaborate monarchy as its crown, and the former cradle of the world's Industrial Revolution is still full of arcane social archaisms. The radical French Revolution yielded to Restoration and to a Second Empire, while preserving a large conservative peasantry for a long time. The American Revolution maintained slavery and after the abolition of that an explicitly institutionalized racism till about 1970. A crucial component of the most progressive political force of twentieth-century US politics, the New Deal coalition, was the vote of the racist one-party states of the South. The working-class Bolshevik Revolution led on to a regime, which substituted political portraits for Orthodox icons in ritual processions, which industrialized the Tsarist tradition of Siberian deportations, and re-installed the Tsarist army traditions in its re-cycling of the Great Patriotic War against Napoleon into the Second World War, and upon victory re-establishing the imperial frontiers.

Nationalism, most scholars would agree, is a modern phenomenon, although there is some controversy about its roots and precedents. However, there is no nationalism without some resurrection of a past, however imagined.

The centrality of European colonialism and imperialism in the rise of contemporary modernity points directly to the cultural and institutional entanglements of global modernities. However, this world-wide pattern of inter-linkages is only just beginning to be opened up to scholarly investigation. For a long time it was hampered by the one-sided gaze of the colonizers, veering between 'Orientalist' scholarship of extra-European pre-modern tradition – often with a most impressive erudition and empathy, e.g., of the Sanskrit scholars William Jones and Max Müller – and, increasingly, dismissive contempt of non-European contemporaneity.

Ensuing a-colonial and anti-colonial perspectives had their own difficulties in seeing complexity and inter-connectivity. 'Modernization theory' after the Second World War struck a more optimistic liberal note of programmatic change, but ignored the particular effects of colonial and imperial history (see further, Therborn, 2000). 'World systems analysis' hit out at the latter and its veiling of the 'development of underdevelopment' (A.G. Frank), but paid little attention to aspects other than colonial and semi-colonial economic underdevelopment. Anti-colonial nationalism, for its part, understandably emphasized overwhelmingly the oppressive and the exploitative character of colonial rule.

Post-colonial studies, arising in English literary studies out of the metropolitan impact of writers from the former Empire, post-colonial anthropology, post-nationalist history, like the Indian 'Subaltern studies', and postmodernist interests outside Europe and North America have here been crucial in opening up a new research agenda. This has included a new awareness of the multi-faceted complexity of the colonial encounters, with their variable mixtures of attraction and repulsion, of service and exploitation, of sincerity and hypocrisy, and their equally many-sided institutional and cultural effects. It is generating a growing scholarly interest in modern extra-European cultural history, and new knowledge about pre-colonial routes and networks of exchange and communication.

The notion of entangled modernities may be able to offer a focus of analysis to new research on the shaping of the modern world, and also to contribute to a more profound theorization of social and cultural change. To do so, it seems that some further conceptual clarification and elaboration are called for to begin with. What modernities? What kinds and what forms of entanglement?

Grasping Modernities in the Plural

In order not to get lost in an endless number of modern cultures, it would be useful to have some outline of the global topography of modernity. Over the past years I have found two mappings useful. One is discursive, summing up the 'grand narratives' of modernity. The other is geo-historical, laying out the main routes to and through modernity in the world.

In the recent history of modernity we may discern at least four major 'master narratives', each constituting a variant of the modern conception of time (see Table 1). The European 'Enlightenment' involved emancipation, and Kantian

Table 1 Master narratives of modernity: major past–future contrasts

<i>The past was</i>	<i>The future will be</i>
Heteronomy, oppression	<i>Emancipation</i> , liberation
Poverty, ignorance, stagnation	<i>Progress</i> , evolution, growth
Different in its preconditions	<i>Victory</i> , successful survival
Old, passé, sclerotic	<i>Vitality</i> , full of life, creative, a new community

'*Mündigkeit*' (maturity), as well as progress. The former has driven a large number of social movements in the ensuing centuries, movements for national liberation, for working-class emancipation, for women's liberation, for gay liberation. The latter perspective has guided cumulative conceptions of knowledge, economic practices and policies, and individual life-course strivings.

The third perspective developed later, in the last third of the nineteenth century, in social Darwinism, in competitive imperialism, and, later, in Fascism. In recent decades it has made a powerful comeback in neoliberal conceptions of global competition.

The fourth one also derives from late nineteenth-century Europe and America, but has been less expressed in political and economic forms. Rather, it is the world-view of modernism as a cultural ideology, of artistic vanguardism, and of fashion. Part of it is modernist art's claim to 'epiphany' (James Joyce), to making manifest something of vital significance which is otherwise inaccessible. Part of it is also a vitalistic or imaginative opposition to mechanical progress, and a search for a post-traditional community (cf. Taylor, 1989: Chapters 23–4).

Given the character of some postmodernist arguments, it should perhaps be added that only a hostile caricature – or a naïve utopia – would confer any rule of one-dimensional single-mindedness upon the above-mentioned master perspectives of modernity. In theory as well as in practice they could contain, e.g., an awareness of the dialectic of oppression and emancipation, of the costs of progress, of its losers as well as of its winners, of new uses of the past. Like any discourse, the modernist ones could be deployed with ambivalence as well as with firm conviction, with conservative caution as well as with radical iconoclasm. In scholarly contexts, the range of possible complexity should not be defined away a priori.

Another, it seems, fruitful way of getting a handle on the variation of 'multiple modernities' is to approach it from the angle of the kind of historical conflict between modernity and tradition, between modernity and anti-modernity. In this vein we may distinguish four main conflictual configurations in the world. Originally they emerged as empirical generalizations, from a world history of the right to vote (Therborn, 1992), but, especially as they can be located in a logical property space, they can also be used as ideal types so that one particular country may have travelled along more than one road (see Figure 1).

The new future orientation of the past centuries first emerged in Europe, not

PRE/ANTI-MODERNITY		PRO-MODERNITY	
	<i>Internal</i>		<i>External</i>
<i>Internal</i>	Europe	<i>Forced</i>	<i>Imported and Learnt</i>
<i>External</i>	New worlds	Colonial zone	Reactive modernization

Figure 1 Roads to/through modernity by the location of forces and cultures for and against

Note: Countries of reactive, or externally induced, modernization include, for example, Japan, China, Ottoman Empire/Turkey, Iran, Siam/Thailand.

as a natural emanation of European civilization, but out of conflicts internal to Europe, to North-Western Europe primarily. In other words, the European route was one of civil war, which pitted the forces of reason, enlightenment, nation/people, innovation, and change against those of the eternal truths of the Church, of the sublime wisdom and beauty of Ancient philosophy and art, of the divine rights of kings, of the ancient privileges of aristocracy, and of the customs of fathers and grandfathers.

In the New Worlds of European settlement, anti-modernity was, in the first rise of modern currents, perceived as mainly external, in the conservative metropolis, in Britain to North America, in Spain and Portugal to Latin America, *and*, increasingly, in the local Others of the settler societies, the natives, the slaves, and the ex-slaves. Independence got rid of the external metropolis, but what to do with the local Others was to haunt the moderns of the New Worlds for a very long time. It still does.

To the Colonial Zone, from North-Western Africa to Southeast Asia, modernity arrived literally out of the barrel of guns, with the colonial conquest, subduing the internal forces of tradition. Modernity was not carried further by settlers, but by new generations of natives, of *évolués* who turned what they had learnt from their conquerors against the latter.

The countries of Reactive Modernization were challenged and threatened by colonial domination, and in the face of these threats a part of the internal elite started to import innovation from the outside. Meiji Japan is the most successful and clear-cut example, but several pre-modern empires embarked upon it.

At another level of comparative generalization, we should take note of the fact that the great modern tasks, of emancipation, progress, or survival looked differently along these roads to and through modernity. Different modernities have had different Others, as obstacles or as categories of reference (see Table 2).

Because of their preoccupation with native pre-modernity, the New World settlers saw the evolution of their societies after independence largely in terms of reinforced European immigration, with a view to 'whitening' the settler societies (Zea, 1965: 65ff., 103ff.; Staub, 1967: Chapter II).

Among the self-centred modernizers one might further distinguish between those cultures which have a universalistic self-conception, seeing themselves as

Table 2 Locations of modernist tasks

<i>The past was</i>	<i>The future will be</i>	
	In our (r)evolution	In catching up with others
In our society until now	Europe	Colonial zone
Under external rule	Developing new worlds	Ex-colonial zone
Under native rule	Independent new worlds	
Our military/economic decay	Successful RM	Early RM countries

Note. RM = countries of reactive modernization.

the best model for others, and those with a particularistic conviction of their own uniqueness and essential difference to all others. The French Enlightenment and American Liberalism have this universalistic self-conception to a very pronounced extent, and it was a general part of European colonialism. Japanese modernity, by contrast, has been more particularistic, although with a regional colonial slant till 1945.

Disentangling Entanglements

Entanglements, to be of analytical usefulness, have to be disentangled. We may, then, distinguish three kinds of entanglements of modernities, each manifesting itself in several forms. On the most general level we may discern a *space* of entanglements, with two dimensions. One refers to *what* is intertwined, and the other *where*, then differentiating two major analytical perspectives, one of them looking at institutions and the second looking into people's minds or into enculturations, constructions of meaning. Then there are the *processes* producing entanglements, and finally, the *effects* of the latter. Table 3 lays out the space of entanglements.

Alongside the constitutive entanglements of modernity and tradition (1–2 in Table 3) and the geo-historical ones (3–4), there are also the internal complexities of modern narratives and modern symbolic forms themselves.

This is not meant as the beginning of a taxonomic catalogue, but as a brief list of lights. To clarify, some examples may be given. Type 1 in Table 3 may be exemplified by the web of industrialization and landed political power and upper-class culture in modern Britain, or by the economics of Japan and its emperor system. It is a constitutive complexity of post-colonial states (Badie, 1992). This type of entanglement is abundantly rich in examples, as has been hinted at above.

With respect to 2, we might point to the frequent combination in the USA of relentless capitalist drive and a strong affirmation of the Christian religion. Or, as another concrete example among many, the anti-colonial nationalism analysed by Partha Chatterjee (1993), which divides the world into an external, colonized society of political economy and science, and an inner spiritual domain of inherited and preserved pre-colonial religion, customs, and family patterns. But

Table 3 The space of entanglements

<i>Entanglements of what</i>	<i>Where</i>	
	Institutions	Enculturations
Modernity and tradition	1	2
Roads to modernity and their travellers	3	4
Master narratives	5	6
Symbolic forms	7	8

nationalism is generally some sort of brew of both modernity and tradition. So was classical modernism in art, as we noticed earlier.

Among cases of the third type, we have the mutations of European endogenous modernity by the effects of colonizing upon the colonizers, upon their polities, their production of knowledge, and their social structure through migratory chains, a fascinating theme still little explored. Or, for instance, the mixture of Reactive Modernization and European civil war in Russian modernity, or of Reactive Modernization, colonized experience, and Europe-borrowed large-scale class organization in China. There is also, as another very important example, the complex triangular relationship of Euro-America (the 'West'), Japan, and China in the first third of the twentieth century, with the Chinese distinguishing 'metropolitan' (model modern) Europe/America and Japan, from the oppressive 'colonial' West and Japan, and with modernity received, assessed, and fought about along all those channels, as well as from Russian literature and from the politics of the Russian Revolution (Shih, 2001).

Fourth, we may, for example, notice the entangled cultural formation of many political and cultural élites in the world, steeped in the European modernity of Oxbridge/London or Paris but set out for action in India, in Nigeria or in Latin America. With the help of an anthropological eye and ear we can find cultural formations at least as complex and entangled among the populace of large post-colonial cities (Wrong, 2000). Diasporic cultures also amply illustrate the possibilities here.

Our fifth option may be exemplified by the combinations of brightening progress narratives and sombre social Darwinian struggle in liberal and neo-liberal economies, or of industrial developmentalist progressivism and the prospect of working-class emancipation in the Communist regimes. Among the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European and American Left there were often world-views including a Marxian story of emancipation, a Spencerian of progress, and a Darwinian of natural struggle and the survival of the fittest.

How different modern master narratives are interwoven may, sixth, be studied also in the enculturation of social actors, highlighted by the often intricate biographies of intellectuals and amazing *mélanges* of their discourse, of Georges Sorel and José Carlos Mariátegui, for instance.

Penultimately, the most important institutionalized manifestation of entanglements of symbolic forms are perhaps to be found in languages, most

strongly in the Creole ones of the Caribbean, in the emergence of *linguae francae* in multilingual polities in Africa and Asia, and in the development of beginning institutional recognition of varieties of English, French, and Spanish in different countries using the same language.

With reference to point 8 earlier, finally, modern art, from Diaghilev and Picasso, has been characterized very significantly by *mélanges* of symbolic forms of different sources (Wollen, 1993). Much more recent, since the end of the twentieth century, ensuing from intercontinental mass communications, is the entanglement in popular mass culture of elements from a wide variety of global cultures. Music around the dawn of the twenty-first century is a major illustration.

Another kind of entanglements are the *processes* by which they are produced. Entanglements are produced by complexities or partialities of interaction, by selective reception, by feedback or side-effects. In short, by a number of processes other than polar star radiation or linear diffusion, through intricate networks of communication – such as, just for example, the significant role of migrants to Latin America in the emergence of modern Arabic prose in early twentieth century² and two-way affectation, through processes of translation and interpretation, and/or through re-combinations of elements, deliberate or not. The possibilities are countless, once your eyes are open to look for them.

Finally, we may turn our attention to the *effects* of entanglements, which may be sought at a high level of theoretical abstraction, such as in a nesting of social and cultural systems or in a composite *habitus*, for instance, of landowner politics and pioneer industrial economics in England, of venture capitalism, pervasive religiosity and ethnic complexity in the USA, of radical socialism, classical poetry, and imperial protocol in Maoist China, of feminine professionalism and peasant patriarchy in Kemalist Turkey. They may also be studied in concrete manifestations, such as the functioning and the strategic uses of ex-colonial legal and linguistic pluralism, the spawning of English studies in Britain by the needs of the Indian Civil Service (Loomba, 1998: 85), the social queries sent out from Madrid to New Spain becoming a model for public inquiries about conditions in the Castile itself (Elliott, 1992: 37), and similar other effects of colonization upon the colonizers.

Relating to a kindred concept, we may say that a major effect of the various entanglements is a fascinating set of hybrid modernities. Entanglement entails a focus on history and historical explanation, hybridity one on outcomes and functioning.

With apologies for my rudimentary skills in graphical computing, the basic difference between unilinear modernization, multilinear multiple modernities, and entangled modernities, might be summed up in a final figure (Figure 2). However, this analytical framework, like any framework is, of course, no more than a scaffold, for a better view, and a better work.

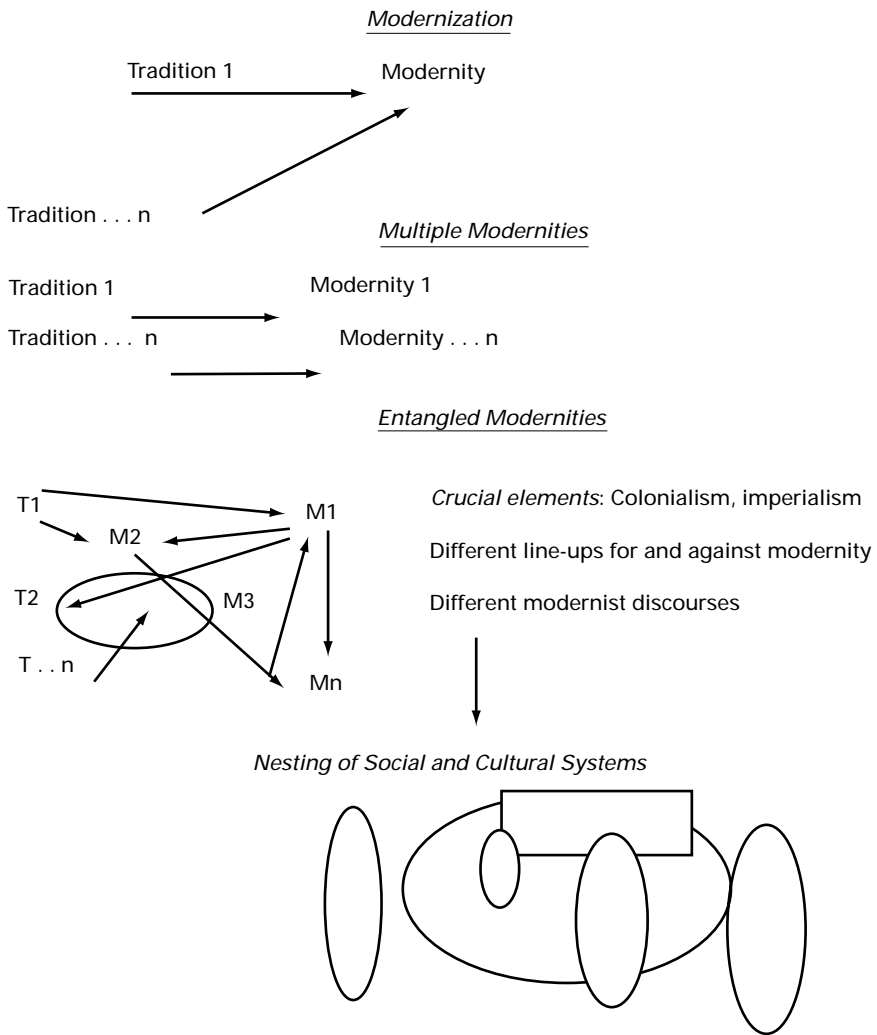


Figure 2 Three conceptions of trajectories of modernity

Notes

1 The concept originates with Shalini Randeria (1999) and began to be further elaborated at a conference on the theme which we organized in cooperation with the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin on 8–10 December 2000, followed up at SCASSS in Uppsala in June 2001.

2 I owe this observation to Jan Retsö, Professor of Arabic and SCASSS Fellow, Spring semester of 2001.

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